

**"HILLS
TO
CLIMB"**

Feldman

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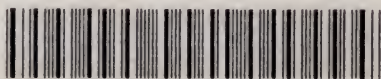
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"Hills to Climb"

Eight Discourses

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN
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*Author of "Judaism and Unitarianism", "We Jews",
"Lights and Shadows", "Kiddush Hashem",
"What is Faith?", etc., etc.*



BETH ISRAEL PULPIT
Hartford, Connecticut

1931

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“HILLS TO CLIMB”

BY


RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on Rosh Hashanah Eve, 5691 (Sept. 22, 1930),
at Temple Beth Israel, Hartford, Connecticut.

“HILLS TO CLIMB”

A Rosh Hashanah Eve Sermon

I

N the morrow, as we follow the traditional Scripture lesson assigned for reading on Rosh Hashanah, we shall be impressed again by the significance of that impressive scene. We will read of Abraham, the first of the Patriarchs, being urged by an Unseen God, to take his son, his only son, him whom he loved so greatly, even Isaac, and go with him unto Mount Moriah and there upon a place to be pointed out to offer up this son as a burnt-offering. We will read that Abraham “took into his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together.” On to the hill they went, and together they ascended it. But, there, instead of offering a human sacrifice, a new understanding, a new vision of God and life came to the Patriarch. No longer was human sacrifice acceptable or desirable. No longer was God to be worshipped in that barbaric manner. And in that new understanding, a new blessing was vouchsafed him and mankind. A forward step was there taken in man’s ascent from the lower to the

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higher level of Faith. And Abraham named the place "Adonai-Yireh" for so "it is said to this day: In the Mount the Lord is seen."

My dear friends, we stand in this twilight hour of a new year, and if we be rightly attuned we should even now be conscious of an urge within us to adventure greatly, to aspire nobly. Something within us stirs, and methinks I hear the monition to seek out the hill where God could be seen and known, and there to receive, perchance, a certain and clearer vision of Life, and of Duty.

II

"And they went both of them together."

My people, come with me to the Hill of Vision! Come, let us go together; let us scale the heights. Come, let us leave the sordid life about us, let us leave the humdrum things, let us escape from the air laden with pollution. Come, let us go in search of the purer, rarefied atmosphere on the Hill. Let us go to the place where the vision is clearer. On the hill a better vision is always assured. On the hill one gains a perspective one cannot have in the valley. The vision from the hill is more inclusive. From the hill one perceives more clearly the nature of the topography. There one sees more of the landscape and one sees further.

You see—down below, in the valley and on the plain, one can see many minute details. But one sees not the whole. Only parts can be discerned,

small fractions and sections are visible only. For, below, we are restricted in our vision, we are constricted in our understanding; our environment limits and circumscribes us. We live within the four ells of our individual contacts and pursuits. And often we come to believe that only that which our physical eye sees, or our hands touch, is true and matters. All else is not real, and does not matter. Our own immediate interests, they are all that matter, we think, and we become so inured, so accustomed to them, that many come to believe that all there is to life and living is contained in just this immediate environment of ours. What is not of it and in it—we believe to be unreal, untrue.

You will recall, perhaps, Plato's great allegory of the cave. A group of men from their childhood are seated in the remote recesses of a deep cave, their backs to the mouth of the cave, their legs and necks so shackled as to constrain them to look straight ahead into the darkness. There they live and spend many years, and their experience of men and life is limited only to their impression of occasional shadows on the walls of their cavern. Truth, fact, reality—these are only the shadows of things they do not see and do not observe.

Then, one day, one of these men is unshackled, and is permitted to go out into the light of day. At first he is blinded from the unaccustomed light. And then, he begins to see and observe

and learn that what erst he thought to be reality was only a shadowy semblance. The learning process is difficult. For a while he continues to believe that his old experience was real and his interpretation of it—the only truth. But slowly he begins to recognize that now he is nearer reality than he ever was, and that his colleagues in the cave were still looking at phantoms only.

And then, one day, he is dragged back into the cave. His judgment now is different from that of the others. His interpretation is different. His understanding deeper. He had seen reality whilst they see but phantoms and shadows. He becomes a laughing stock; forsooth, he is an idealist now. And they, the self-acclaimed realists who have no knowledge nor concept of the real nature of things, believe him to have gone wrong by the experience, "and that it was not worth-while even to attempt the ascent." "And," says Plato, "if any one endeavored to set them free and carry them to light, would they not go so far as to put him to death, if they could only manage to get them into their power?"

How like unto most of us are those prisoners in the cave! How purblind and mistaken we are as to values! How unjust to those who have touched and perceived reality! How quick to insist upon our limited, narrow experience as all that matters and is worth-while!

Let us look at our lives. For most of us, our business, our profession, our particular occupa-

tion, is not that the end-all and be-all of interest? For most of us, are not the daily routine and grind of life like unto the chain that shackled by necks and legs the prisoners in the cave? These are our supreme concerns. Nothing else really matters.

And for relaxation whither do we flee? Why, only to such social contacts as are of necessity limited to a very small social circle of people who generally are shackled as we are, who perceive the same phantoms and adjudge them real, people who generally have the same ideas, the same interests, indulge in the same kind of talk, with no greater, deeper insight than is that of the manacled prisoners of the cavern.

And then, when we go beyond the limited social circles, and think in terms of the community, when we think and talk of our city, our State, and sometimes of our nation, we do so largely only in so far as these affect us personally and individually. We view these, again, from the level of circumscribed experience, and, honestly, we are very selfish and therefore very unstatesmanlike, and utterly unvisioned in our approach. We see, so very little beyond the small circumference of which we are the centre.

And the consequence is that we become tragically provincial in all of our relationships—in our vocations, in our social life, in our political grasp, in our understanding. Our horizon is found not much further away than the tip of our

nose, or it ends at the visible periphery of our personal concerns. And as we surrender to this provincialism our process of living is essentially nothing other than vegetative. To the unthinking and unsensitive amongst us there never comes a vision of real beauty, *there never comes even a sense of discontent*. Whilst to the sensitive ones there comes often an unhappy discontent that is born of the consciousness of being chained to the walls of our environment, helpless to tear or break away, and with it a sense of *ennui*, of boredom, a feeling of "what's-the-use," that leads to cynicism, and often, in resignation, to a withdrawal from life and its challenges into the unhappiness and morbidity of our own shells.

If you think that this statement is overdrawn, I urge you to look about; yes, even to look within yourselves. How many are bored? How many do you know who do not even know that they are dying spiritually of boredom? How many are there whose minds are sclerotic, whose hearts are desiccated? How much cynicism do we behold, how much of selfishness, how small and petty and picayune are the lives of so many about us? As I go through life, as I grow older, as I observe more and multiply my contacts with men and affairs, as I go about quietly observing and evaluating, the more do I see of these ingrown souls, these people who have become spiritually strabismic from a habit of too closely, too persistently looking down the length of their own noses!

III

Now, into this humdrum drabness we Jews have introduced these pauses, these rest periods, of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And as we pause in the midst of the hurly-burly, direction is given to thought, and we are urged to appraise not only the things and aspects of life that are close by, but also to turn away from the immediate to the intermediate and from that to the more remote. We are bidden by the majesty of these days to behold that which lies so nigh, to be sure; yet, also, to avert our gaze from these to those other aspects which are both so very vital and to our vision so most uncommon. "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills" sang the Psalmist in search of these uncommon experiences of life. Indeed, we are compelled to lift our eyes unto the hills, not only; but we are prompted to scale those heights to seek there momentary escape from ourselves, so that from those illumined higher planes we might behold the level on which we live and toil and experience. And fortunate, indeed, are we that we do, for from the heights new vistas, a new horizon, a different perspective are opened up unto us, and somehow even our habitual lives can and do become more meaningful and more satisfying for us!

IV

Tonight, I wish not to deal with things in the valleys of life. On the morrow, and on other occasions during this season I shall address my-

self to them. Tonight I would rather strike the key of upwardness, of hopefulness. Tonight I would rather point out the other path which habitually we do not tread. Tonight I would rather urge you and myself to a realization of the fact that what we see and touch and taste are not all there is to life or to us. Tonight I ask you to dwell—if only for a short while—on the Hill of Vision, on the heights where ideals are perceived.

It was on the hill that Abraham received a new vision and understanding of God and life.

It was on the hill—we are told—that Moses received the moral law.

It was in the hill that Moses received the ideal pattern and design by which he built the sanctuary and its utensils on Israel's march through the wilderness.

It was from Nebo's height that Moses perceived the Land of Promise, and there he died, but happy in the knowledge that the Land of Promise is neither phantom nor shadow, but reality.

It was on Horeb's heights that Elijah heard the still, small voice of God which in the storm and grind of life in the valley he could not hear.

And when Samson was held captive by the Philistines in the city of Gazzah and there seemed to be no escape for him, we are told that he ripped the gates of the city out of the confining wall and carried them to the top of the mount near Hebron where he found himself free.

And so, remembering these, I summon you to climb the mountain with me, not a physical mountain, to be sure, but to the heights where our hearts and souls might soar, and the realization become a conviction that life is not all subject to the limitation of our physical senses.

V

Let us recognize and acknowledge that ideals exist! Strange as it may sound, there *are* people who seem not to know it! Strange as it may appear to some of us, there are people whose lives are eloquent with nothing so much as a denial of ideals! Judged by their ways of living, by their manner of dealing with their fellows, by the things that engross their attention, by their standards of doing, one would think that there is no other level of being than theirs, that sordidness, avarice, vileness, are praiseworthy; that human kindness, decency in all relationships, sensitiveness to the finer things of life, are reprehensible and culpable.

And yet, there *are* ideals, great, sweeping, compelling ideals! There is the ideal, the fact—that is God! There is the reality of this Supreme Being, incorporeal, invisible, unmerchandisable, not to be discounted in the bank nor to be locked up in a strong box, yet a real, stirring fact, the summation of all that is good and true and noble; the source of all, the goal of all; the Father—compassionate, sometimes stern, often inscrutable, always accessible; the Friend—considerate

and reliable; the Companion ever present—in our joys He rejoices with us, in our sorrows—He cheers and sustains us. God—the Ideal Supreme, the Ideal Superb, the Ideal Transcendent!

There is the ideal of Justice between men, not the Justice that is punitive, that punishes, that exacts eye for eye and tooth for tooth, but the Justice that is a state of mind, an attitude of life that recoils from hurting another, from depriving another of his just due, that recognizes the rights of others to happiness, to comfort, to a chance to make life vibrant with joyous significance, the Justice that does not press down but lifts up, that does not impoverish but enriches the soul; the Justice that does not destroy what could blossom into beauty, that does not heedlessly crush what can give joy and delight to another.

There is the ideal of Man which is implied in the recognition of the dignity of man and the dignity of human personality.

There is the ideal of Brotherhood that sees in every man a child of God, and in every nation another branch of the divine household; the Brotherhood that sees in every man a friend, and in every human being a vehicle of divine intention and purpose; the Brotherhood that spells fellowship and confidence and good-will.

There is the ideal of Peace, not the Peace that is passivity and indolence, but that which is nobly and adventurously creative; not the peace that is just non-resistive to evil, negative peace, but the

peace which banishes rancor and hatred and injustice and wickedness, that recognizes the right of all men and all nations to "a place in the sun", and grants to all the right inalienable to fulfill themselves and to be themselves though they differ radically from us.

These, and other ideals which might be mentioned, are ideals which have priceless value when appraised in terms of the Kingdom of God. And let there be no mistake about it. Howsoever the stupid and the sinner and the wicked may sneer and scoff, these have compelling force. They are *forces* which have changed and are changing the world, they are *the* forces that transform, *they* are the progressive, propelling forces of civilization!

And so, as I ask you to ascend the heights with me and acknowledge the existence and value of these, I invite you also to make some or all of them not just ideals, but *your* ideals, and with them as your lodestars dare to advance toward their realization.

I can hear some say—"He is a dreamer. He is dreaming dreams for a world that is wide awake." And my answer is: You are precisely right. I *am* dreaming, but in a world that has *always* dreamed when it wanted to advance! I accept the appellation of dreamer, and I challenge you, too, to dare to dream. But when you dream, let them be noble dreams not nightmares, let your dreams have sweep, horizon, scope, beauty.

And may I not suggest to you, that from the heights whither dreams, ideals will carry you, from the heights where you might be detached from the hollow and mundane, even the sordid might begin to look less sordid, and in the perspective thus acquired we might discover even in the worldly life on the plains below, a rhythm, a harmony, an order, yea, even a dignity which we did not suspect before. For under the spell of ideals even the everyday affairs and things become idealized, and as we behold them in the new light which then glows in our souls, *every* relationship, be it in business, in the profession, in domestic life and in the larger social grouping, becomes suffused with a light in which we never saw it before.

VI

And may I not suggest this also? It is true, eternally, gloriously true, that *we are what we dream*, and by the same token that the coward can never realize his dreams. Captain Wolfgang von Gronau, the intrepid German aviator who recently flew across the northern sweeps of the Atlantic, said the other day, and he spoke truly: "One must have some daring if one is to live dreams."

And is not this the real test of the value and worth of dream and vision—that one *wills* to convert the dream into reality, that one desires the world to be as it was seen from the heights, and that one wishes for himself to be as he was

or is for the dreaming moment. When we thus dream we create new, different, higher standards for ourselves, and these very standards help us, aid us to become what the ideal standard demands.

After all, which is the noblest life? Surely not that which never would rise above itself. Surely not that which never knows the joy and the bliss of an ideal discontent. The smug are never noble. The contented are never great. The satisfied are never creative. The static are the satisfied. They are the stunted in life. And the enslaved are those who would not risk to tear the very gates out of the walls of Philistinism that they might be free to roam on the heights.

VII

Come, then, my people, and let us go together in these stirring, challenging days of holy awe. These days are surcharged with ideals! They tell us of God who is good and just and merciful. They tell us of man capable of achieving nobility. They tell us of a human society that is destined to become the Kingdom of God. These days, in this season, tell us—and truly—that a day spent in God's courts is better than a thousand days spent elsewhere. They tell us of perfections which even if unrealized are greatly compensatory.

Let us yield to the charm and mellowness of these days. They will give us clearer vision, they

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will endow us with hopefulness and buoyancy. They will tell us of possibilities of spiritual growth, and they will challenge us with the ought even as they will impel us to want that which we ought to be.

And, then, when the season will have passed we shall return to our places in the valley of life. But our eyes will still be luminous with the vision we beheld, and with the faith here reborn, with the hope here fanned into a great burning, we shall muster the necessary courage to convert this valley of our existence into "a Valley of Decision" where evil and sin and wrong will at least in part be stamped out. For, in the hill, we shall have beheld, as Moses did, the pattern of the ideal life, and we shall aim to make the idea—real!

"I want my hills!

Hills!

The trail that scorns the hollows.

So let me hold my way

By nothing halted,

Until at close of day I stand exalted

High on my hills to dream

Dear hills that know me.

"And then how fair will seem

The lands below me!

How pure at vesper time

The far bells chiming!

"God! Give me hills to climb,

Hills! Hills!

And strength for climbing."

ON THE JEWISH MAIN STREET

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on Rosh Hashanah, 5691, (September 23, 1930),
at Temple Beth Israel, Hartford, Connecticut.

ON THE JEWISH MAIN STREET

A Rosh Hashanah Sermon



HAVE often heard the question asked, largely by people who are habitual visitors to the Synagog only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, "Why is it that rabbis choose these occasions to scold their congregations?" My answer to this question is, strange as it may sound to some of you, that as a rule rabbis do not scold. There is that about the word "scolding" which suggests harsh fault-finding and rabbis try not to be harsh. The rabbi often does reprove, he does offer, to use the good old Hebrew word for that kind of preaching, "musar," and "musar" translated means discipline, it means morality, it means good conduct. The rabbi, therefore, attempts to offer the word of guidance that may lead to the right kind of conduct, to speak the word of counsel that may strengthen morality, to speak the word of warning that may spell self-discipline.

And when we gather in our Synagogs on these great holy days in our Jewish calendar what is it that brings us here? What is the burden, so to speak, of these great and awesome days? Our

fathers designated this day as the *Yom Hazzik-karon*—the Day of Memorial. And the “Memorial” that we have in mind at this time is not one of sadness, it has not at all the connotation of death and the departed. We do not so much *memorialize* those who are gone, as we *recall*, we bring up to *remembrance* the experiences of life which were ours in the twelve-months that have passed. And as we gather for this kind of remembrance what is it that we might recall, what is it that we do recall?

Well, we gratefully think at this moment of the many blessings which we enjoyed, the joys, the happiness, the bliss, the achievements that were ours. We are grateful for the friendships we have had. We are grateful for the contacts with the lives of others which came to us, be they the lives of those who are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, or those others who have entered our lives and with consecration have moulded and fashioned them.

We have all known blessings like unto these, and it is well for us, as we pause at this moment to think of them, and to speak reverently our gratitude to God and to them for the enrichment of character and life they brought to us.

But as we pause in remembrance at this time shall our thoughts be only of the *blessings* of life? Shall our mind’s eye behold only the sunny places of life? Is it meet for us to ignore the other aspects of life, the negative, the unpleasant,

those which made and make for unhappiness? The negative, too, has value and significance for us if we be thoughtful men and women. And so as we recall the experiences of life in the year that has passed, and as we give grateful thought to the blessings that we have enjoyed, must we not pause also to meditate upon the disappointments and negations we have known? What person who is really honest with himself, would choose to look only upon the pleasing aspects of life and would deliberately turn his gaze away from that which is unpleasant, from that which is uninviting whether in his own life, in the life of other individuals, or in the experience of a community? Why ignore them? We have something to gain by thinking of these unpleasantnesses, of the losses we have sustained through death, through sickness, through reverses and adversity. Through thoughtful consideration and the realization of our duty and task, might we not, under God, turn even these into blessings for ourselves and for others in the days that are to come?

And yet as we recall these, we should recall not only those things that have been taken away from us, be they dear ones, or prosperity, or health, or comforts. I feel, that we should recall at this time also the fact that in the course of the year there was much neglected by us that ought not to have been neglected, that things have been left undone which for the good of our

lives and souls ought to have been done. Ought we not to recall on this day and in this hour, that during the past year opportunities to serve, opportunities to grow morally, have not always been grasped by us? That on many occasions opportunities were offered us to make the moral choice and that we failed to embrace those occasions, that we failed to steel ourselves against temptations, that we failed to stand uprightly and resist the lure of the false, the tinsel and tawdriness of the unmoral, the seeming fascination of wickedness, of the ungodly, and of the accursed?

Verily, this is the Day of Memorial, and even as we review the angelic hosts of blessings so should also the ghosts of the past, hosts and hosts of them, arise at this moment of recollection and remembrance to taunt us and to scoff at us. And we, we whose consciousness of the spiritual is not dead but merely perhaps blunted, when we become aware of these sit in judgment—upon ourselves, upon our weaknesses, upon our failings.

You see, our fathers called this day not only the Day of Memorial or Remembrance. They also designated it the *Yom Haddin*, the Day of Judgment. They believed that on this day God, "like a shepherd, seeketh out his flock and causeth them to pass beneath His crook." We, too, believe that we stand in the sight and in the presence of God and also we know—do we not?—that deep, deep within us there arises that still, small,

accusing voice of conscience which, however we might try to escape it, does persistently and insistently challenge and call to us?

The accusing conscience on this day of recall and of judgment raises its voice not alone against the individual. Jewish life, let it ever be remembered, is always communal. It is the *k'lal* that is always thought of, the *community*, and not alone the individual. The doctrine of individual salvation is one of the concepts which does not fascinate the Jew.

And so, when on this morning of Remembrance we would think not alone of the blessings we have known but also of the curses, it is not at all surprising that I think in terms of the Jewish community, of its needs and its weaknesses. I think of Jewish life on the whole, I think of the Jewish Main Street as Sinclair Lewis, some years ago, spoke of the general Main Street of American life.

You will recall that *Main Street* as depicted by Sinclair Lewis, is American small-town life. You will recall, perhaps, that the characters there revealed, though living in the smaller community, are such as are found without searching, in every city in the country, in every town, village and hamlet, on Park Avenue in New York as well as in the slums of San Francisco, in the cities on the Lakes as in those on the Gulf. And let it be remembered that there is much in that life that is healthy and clean and pure; much that is true

and sound is found on Main Street. There are affection and devotion on Main Street. The devotion is not only to persons but also to duties, to high professional standards, to ideals of service.

But at the same time there is much on that Main Street that is not pleasant to behold. Much of that life is gray and dull. Much of it is petty, it is unthinkably narrow and limited. The horizon, as I pointed out last night, for many of those who dwell there is close-by, not far away. Life on Main Street, all too often, is flat and sluggish, marked by nothing so much as by *ennui* and spiritual tedium. It is the habitat of small talk, of spiritual poverty, of religious apathy, of sickening cynicism, of indifference to, and often aversion for all that which the so-called social leaders or industrial leaders do not know or do not approve or sanction.

Such is Main Street of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Such, too, is Main Street in New York, in Philadelphia, in Chicago, in Galveston, in Los Angeles, and, if we may return across the continent, even in Hartford.

Now this Main Street of American life has its counterpart in Jewish life. There is a *Jewish* Main Street, and on this Main Street we can find exactly what Sinclair Lewis finds on the larger Main Street. We find there much that is good, much that is healthy, much that is very fine. There is much in the Jewish Main Street that is

heartening and encouraging and flattering. But shall we stop there? Shall we look only at these pleasing aspects of Jewish life on the Main Street and fail to look at the others? By the side of beauty there is also much that is painfully ugly. By the side of that which is healthy and vital, we find much that is sickly and unwholesome. By the side of that which is inviting and alluring, we find also that which is utterly repulsive.

I know that there are some before me here who even now are beginning to be uneasy. They are such as suspect that I am about to launch into an exhaustive and exhausting catalogue of all of the discoverable weaknesses of the Jewish community and of individuals in that community. If there be those who thus fear, let me give them this assurance that I do not delight in seeing weaknesses and ugliness upon the Jewish Main Street. I had rather be unable to find them. Besides, your Prayer Books are before you, and your prayers are in the vernacular, a language which you speak, the language which you understand. And if you have paid heed to the words you have read, to the prayers you have spoken, you have indeed confessed to much more than I can enumerate to you: "Our Father our King, we have sinned before Thee. Our Father, our King, be merciful and answer us for we can plead no merit before Thee." Think of the implications of these, even as our fathers, with greater candor and with greater humility, proceeded to

confess to sins of which many of us are more guilty than they were, except that we lack the courage and honesty and humility to admit it:

“The sin which we have sinned against Thee in stubbornness or in error,

“The sin which we have sinned against Thee in the evil meditations of the heart,

“The sin which we have sinned against Thee by word of mouth,

“The sin which we have sinned against Thee by the abuse of power, by the profanation of Thy Name, by disrespect for parents and teachers, by exploiting and dealing treacherously with our neighbor.”

They admitted “that we have sinned, we have transgressed, we have done perversely.” And so do you and I, on the Day of Atonement, speak these same words.

No, I do not propose to be exhaustive in the treatment of the weaknesses and the diseases of the Jewish Main Street, but some of them I think we might consider, for they are amongst “the sons of Anak”, the towering giants who are over-casting and overshadowing the good that is found in our midst. Indeed, they are growing rapidly and are gaining strength, and unless we stop nourishing them, they will master us completely, even as some of us have already become their slaves.

What are some of these dominating evil spirits on the Jewish Main Street? Well, for one it is our old friend or enemy, Indifference—a

paralyzing, deadening, spiritual indifference that is stalking on the Jewish Main Street. It is not the indifference that sometimes shows itself in a want of support of the needy, the sick, the indigent. It is not the indifference that would show itself in unsupported charitable institutions. To its credit be it said, the Jewish heart responds readily to the call of the unfortunate, and if individual Jews here and there are not always as generous as they might be, it is true none the less that generosity in the support of the broken and the crushed of life is and has been the merited mark and badge of honor of the Jewish community.

But there is another indifference and a more tragic one. We are indifferent in matters concerning the soul, the spirit, of the Jew. So many of us have forgotten the truth, undeniable, unquestioned, that "not by bread alone does man live, but by that which comes out of the mouth of the Lord", by that which nourishes the hearts and souls of men. So many of us forget that. You ask a Jew to give to the charities, to this or that philanthropic institution, and generally he will give. He may need to be convinced, he may need a little urging, he may even require some social pressure, but he will give. But, on the other hand, ask the Jew to be more liberal in the support of those agencies in Jewish life which provide not for milk, or rent, or ice, or coal, but for those which are calculated to serve the needs

of the Jewish spirit, such as our educational agencies, our religious agencies, our cultural agencies, and the response is pitiful. Our spiritual forces are languishing for want of the proper support. None of them are functioning as they should and might be functioning, because on the Jewish Main Street there is an appalling want of concern, because there is not a lively interest in those agencies which more than anything else might help save the Jew and make him what he was destined to be, the apostle of idealism, of righteousness, in the world. And bear in mind, it is not the want of agencies that we are suffering from, but it is rather from the unsatisfied needs of those agencies of the spirit which we have and which we might enable to continue to exist not only, but existing to give a maximum of service.

Take our congregations. Agencies of the spirit *par excellence* they should be. But there is not a congregation in the land that is making a maximum contribution to life! There is not a congregation in the land that is doing all that it might be expected to do. Why is this? The answer is very simple. Because their respective constituencies do not wish it, they are not sufficiently interested to see to it that a maximum contribution be made. Our congregations are not functioning as they ought to be, because members of congregations do not take an active, lively interest in their own congregations. Our congre-

gations do not function properly because the teachings of the Synagog do not reach the people, and they are not reached because so many of the people are too indifferent to care or to desire to know of them. How many are there who take an intense interest in the problems of our congregations, in the work of the Synagog? How many think in terms of the Synagog, in terms of the greatest good which the Synagog might do? How many are there who do give a thought to the work which we are trying to do, or evince enough concern and interest to come forward and say "this might be done", "that should be done" and do not stop there? Important as advice may be—merely to give advice is insufficient. We have too many people who sit in the bleachers and shout advice to the players. What we need are people who advise but add: "Here I am, use me, let me serve with you." How many are actually, seriously concerned about the spiritual life of the younger generation, so concerned as to be willing to make sacrifices, to deny themselves some indulgences, certain physical pleasures in order that we may assure a moral and spiritual life for our adolescent youth? How many parents have really attempted to urge their young people to remain loyal to the teachings of the Confirmation Year, to remain faithful to the vows of that day of Consecration and who themselves set an example? Some parents do try it! But, there are parents who prevent their children from being faithful,

who brutally sneer and scoff at the inherent piety of their children, who put stumbling blocks in their paths and themselves become the wicked tempters, luring their children away from loyalty and faithfulness and devotion! I know such parents, and know whereof I speak!

Back of all this is the curse of Indifference, and it is this gigantic indifference which is being fed not by convictions, but by a thoughtless stupidity that seems to be gripping so many on the Jewish Main Street!

Then there is another of these "sons of Anak." I do not know just how to label it. It bears a family resemblance to the one I have just spoken of and yet it is sufficiently different to be singled out. Shall I call it "Self-worship"? Shall I label it "Smugness"? But whatever the label, the giant is there, and he is thriving. What is it that feeds this giant so adequately? I have often thought that it is a mistaken and misleading sense of self-sufficiency. And again there are times I think it is a lack of honesty with themselves that exposes people to the baneful influence of this wicked spirit and helps him to grow and to entrench himself.

I know such people in this congregation and in other congregations all over the country. (It is by no means a local malady.) I find them amongst the rich, amongst the poorer ones, and amongst the poor. I find them amongst people of education as well as amongst those humbler

folk who have had no formal education. I find people afflicted with this disease everywhere. They are people who—if they are poor—are so preoccupied with their physical needs, and if they are rich, are so preoccupied with themselves, as to forget their souls. They are so busy with themselves and their worldly attainments, their social pleasures, social ambitions, or craving for position, that they have lost the essential humbleness of spirit, and it is that more than anything else—the humbleness of spirit—that would guide their steps to the House of God more frequently than on death anniversaries perhaps, or on Rosh Hashanah and the Kippur Day. They are people who are so engrossed either with their business pursuits or their physical recreations as to find no time to give thought to the sanctification of their homes through symbol and prayer. And as they persevere in this, in time they come to consider themselves superior even to worship, and consider it an affront to be thought in need of the instruction and message to be received from rabbi or teacher. And yet, is it not strange, they would not be considered decently buried when the grim reaper had finished his work, without the eulogy and praise and service of that same teacher.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say that these are necessarily bad people, these self-sufficient ones. Some of them are big-hearted and open-handed. Some of them are

active on behalf of charitable institutions. They are, in a measure, interested in public affairs. Some of them like to be considered representative Jewish citizens. They are often men and women of general culture, of refinement of manners. Many of them are the ones whom on occasions we delight to honor. But take them throughout the Jewish community, the known and the lesser known, the wealthy, and those not so wealthy, the influential and those who would like to be, they are amongst those whom we most frequently miss in the Synagogs. They are the ones who take the least interest in the general educational problem of Jewry. Sometimes I think, and I submit the question to you today in utter kindness, are not they the people who do set the example in philanthropic enterprise, are not they the ones who set the example in civic service, are not they the ones who "set the pace" socially? And should not they be the ones to set the example and be the active leaders in the religious, cultural and spiritual life on the Jewish Main Street even as many of them are leaders in other enterprises on the larger Main Street?

I say, with conscious knowledge of what I am saying, that if the Jewish Main Street languishes religiously, if it is culturally starved, if it is parched spiritually, then can the larger share of the blame be laid at the feet of some of these whom the people recognize as "leaders." Socially their example is emulated; industrially, profes-

sionally, they are followed. Their lives, rightly or wrongly, are patterned after. They are the exemplars of the masses, and their example for good, for loyalty, for piety, for responsibility, for consecration would be followed just as surely as are their standards of living and manners, just as surely as their present self-sufficiency and smugness are emulated.

Two weeks ago was the first anniversary of the death of Louis Marshall. And I remind you of it only to illustrate the point I am making of what lay leadership can do in stirring the Jewish consciousness and in setting an example which does not only challenge but actually attract others to fine loyalty and devoted service.

Need I rehash at this time all the statistics concerning Jewish children in this community who remain utterly untouched by any Jewish cultural influence? Need I state the very evident fact that we in this community, as others in other communities, are tragically and almost criminally negligent of the future of Jewish life in America? One need not be a prophet to realize conditions. One need but look about honestly, carefully, thoughtfully, to realize what really is happening.

I have spoken of only two of these giants, Indifference and Self-sufficiency, because I consider them the most wicked of all. But there are others, which I shall not name today. And they are breathing poison into the Jewish Main Street.

It is no consolation to me, and ought to be none to you, to be told that similar conditions exist on the general Main Street. That the churches suffer even more than the synagogues is very little solace to my soul. It neither helps, nor strengthens, nor justifies. It only should arouse us to greater care and more intelligent precautions.

I do not wish to be a prophet of woe, I dislike to point out the doom, I am pained and grieved beyond words that such is the situation, that there is need for this sort of exhortation, that there is need for the word of warning and alarm to be spoken. But, fellow Jews, we on the Jewish Main Street are like unto them portrayed in Sinclair Lewis' book. They cry "Let us alone!" People are alarmed over the possibility of their being disturbed in their self-complacency. It is being urged,—and how often have I been urged by people!—to let them alone. Main Street, I am told, is happy. Main Street is satisfied. Main Street is content. "Let us alone." I expect to be told that I am unduly alarmed. I hope it is so. I will be told, I am sure, that so long as Jews contribute their share to the Community Chest, that so long as Synagogues are maintained, though they be unfrequented, that so long as rabbis are trained and supported, just that long is it an error to disturb the people, to alarm them, to trouble their consciences. But I say to you, men and women, as I stand before God on this Day of

Judgment, before the tribunal of God and of Jewish history, that unless *we are disturbed* in our composure and bestir ourselves to rectify our lives, the Jewish Main Street will meet the disaster which it courts and which it will then deserve! I say to you with all of the earnestness and sincerity that are in me—"A house divided is doomed to destruction" (Derech Eretz Zuta 5)! Jewish life cannot continue three-fourths wrong and one-quarter right. We cannot permit a titanic indifference to congeal our lives. We dare not allow ignorance to burden us. We must not tolerate cynicism; it is corroding our very lives. We need not permit materialism to "unsoul" us, to blind us, yea deaden us to the sublimer influences of the higher and the purer and the nobler elements of life.

This, after all, the realization of our duty, the recognition of the task before us after we had examined our conduct and our lives—this is the purpose of our congregating here. What else could we be here for? This is the message of Rosh Hashanah unto us, and to hear it and then to heed it, is not this our immediate task? It is a call to the conscience of the Jew. It is an appeal to the soul of the Jew. It is a summons for the Jew to forsake the slough of the life accursed and turn to the path of the noontide brightness.

I plead with you, men and women of Beth Israel, by all that is true and sacred, bestir yourselves, and let us begin here and now! The

sacred memories of the year and of the years passed, the fervent hopes for this New Year and the other years which we pray may come for us all, all of these conspire to help us to resolve that a year hence the Jewish Main Street, at least in our midst, may present a different and more cheerful aspect spiritually, religiously, Jewishly; and that through the efforts of all of us collectively and that of each of us individually, our lives might be sanctified, our conduct be adjudged unimpeachable, our hopes as a result of our deeds be fulfilled. Then shall we say, not as we do say now,

“Evil year—end swiftly;
Blessed year—come speedily”,

but—

“Blessed year make place
For year more blessed”

and athwart the skies of 5691, the year now beginning and then closing, we shall find written the judgment human and divine, the judgment which is our present prayer and hope: *Shanah Tovah*, a Happy Year, a Blessed Year, a year consecrated through service and hallowed through worth, a year of spiritual fulfillment and of great and noble achievement.

In this spirit, with this hope, thus praying, I wish for all of you *L'Shanah Tovah Tikkosevu*—May you be inscribed unto a good, and therefore, a Happy Year! *Amen*.

“NOT A KADDISH
WILL BE SAID”


BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on Atonement Eve, 5691 (October 1, 1930),
at Temple Beth Israel, Hartford, Conn.

"NOT A KADDISH WILL BE SAID"

A Kol Nidre Sermon

 HERE is a German word which expresses the experience of being a Jew. It is "*Judenschmerz*", "the pain of being a Jew." And there are two types of *Judenschmerz*. There is, first, that ordinary *Judenschmerz* which comes to all of us who are loyally Jewish. The pain, then, is voluntarily assumed, we choose to bear the burden of our Jewishness, and when one chooses to bear any burden there is compensation, even if the burden be trying. Then there is the other type which comes to those Jews who would escape their Jewishness. For them it is doubly painful to be Jews.

In the first instance, the *schmerz* or pain one endures, is not one that comes from within,—it is a pain inflicted by others. In the other type, it is a pain that comes from within, and they who suffer, endure a hellish agony. As a Jew, I share the pain of the first. I pity the other. The first is hurt by others by reason of his Jewishness; but he is loyal, he is faithful, he chooses to be a Jew,

and great as is the pain, and great as the discomfort may at times be, he rises superior to both because within him there is a resistance to the external foe, which brings him great happiness. Such a Jew is endowed with Jewish dignity; he is gifted with worth. The other type of Jew suffers not only because he is a Jew, but also because he is sorry for himself. He laments the fact that his is the misfortune to be a Jew. He is sorry for himself because he is what he would rather not be, and because he would like to be what he cannot possibly be. He seeks that which is impossible plus that which is unworthy and cowardly. Happiness he does not know as a Jew, because he surrenders in cowardice and as he seeks an escape from Jewish living and shirks the duties imposed by such living, he is already a potential renegade and a betrayer of his heritage and his trust.

You will recall the story of Jonah, which we read tomorrow afternoon at our Services. Jonah, while on a boat at sea, in the midst of a severe storm, is asked who he is, what is his occupation, whence he comes, which is his land, who his people are, and his answer is significant. He does not hide, he does not equivocate, he does not hem-and-haw about it. His answer is forthright: "I am a Hebrew, and the Lord, God of Heaven do I fear." This designation seems to mean much, because it answers all the questions that have been put to him and reflects a state of mind which seems to say, that whatever happens to him after-

wards, the burdens of life seem to be easier because in his simple forthright Jewishness he knows what to expect.

And so for us, too, it is just as well to admit and recognize the fact that anti-Semitism is not an unusual fact, but is something that the Jew ought to expect and be accustomed to. I have often said it, and I say it again, I am not annoyed by anti-Semitism. I accept it. I accept the fact that Jews are disliked, that they are discriminated against, and I believe they will continue to be discriminated against for some time to come. I accept this fact, as I do certain other facts which are inevitable. For instance, some of us are given to baldness, and all of us are getting older from day to day and old age is approaching. There is nothing to be done about either one of those facts. One simply has to take them for granted, and when one attempts to deny these facts, one only makes himself ludicrous in the attempt. Do you know of anything that is funnier than an aging man trying to misrepresent his age, unless it be an aging woman who tries to act the flapper? There is simply nothing that can be done about it. They are *facts* of life and they have to be taken as they are. And as Arthur Schnitzler, the great Jewish writer in Europe, pointed out in a recent interview on this subject of anti-Semitism—"It is a sensible plan," he said, "to tolerate anti-Semitism as the fate that inevitably belongs to the Jew, a fate which cannot be changed." He quotes

Spinoza as having written once that, "An evil which is inevitable, ceases to be an evil." It simply is a fact. And facts one accepts,—there is nothing else that one can do about them.

And so in the matter of anti-Semitism, we have to accept the fact that people dislike us. Shall we compel them to like us? It cannot be done. It is not that they have reasons for it, they have none that are valid. And the excuses vary from person to person and from age to age. They dislike us, that is all that matters, and no matter what we do and what we are, we are in the wrong. You remember the old quatrain:

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell
The reason why, I cannot tell;
But this I know and know full well
I do not like thee, Dr. Fell."

And this is the only honest, valid reason for Jew-baiting there is.

One of the foremost critics of Germany, Alfred Kerr, in a recent essay on the "Jewish Question in Europe", says to us:

"Jews, if you are logical, you are called heartless. If you have a heart, you are called weaklings. If you are made prisoners, you are called clumsy. If you are quick-witted, you are called superficial. If you have strength of character, you are called egotists. If you are bent on making the world better, you are called disturbers. And all of this because you are a minority in the world and because you are somebody."

Which reminds me of Franz Werfel's story, called "Class Reunion", where we are told of the

young Jewish lad, Adler, who was persecuted in school by his Christian schoolmates because of his acknowledged superiority; and one of his schoolmates, later in life, admits to himself that his "repugnance (to Adler) was really based on the fact that he is conscious of the Jew in Adler, that is, of the race from which the world is willing to accept everything but superiority."

Now what can we do under these circumstances? Shall we consciously and deliberately become just nobody? Shall we deliberately proceed to give to the world less of ourselves, of our service, of our ideas, of our hopes, of our dreams, of our passion for life and living? Shall we deliberately attempt to be less than we are? Shall we withdraw from life? No, such withdrawal will not help, for then we are caught on the other horn of the dilemma. We would then become the pariahs, the parasites of life—useless, worthless, non-contributing elements in the midst of civilization. What, then, is left for us to do, except it be just this: As self-respecting people to accept the facts of life as they are and proceed to live our own lives as best we can.

I wish, all of you, my people, would read that magnificent little book from the pen of Edmond Fleg, which appeared about a year ago in English, entitled, "Why I Am a Jew." Fleg, at one time in his youth, renounced Judaism. He sought to escape it. Today he not only is back, but he is one of the most valuable members of the com-

munity of Israel. What brought him back? Just the realization, through meeting anti-Semitism, that each of us belongs somewhere, and that if one would find happiness in life, one must find it in that *milieu*, in that group which is closest and nearest to him. Fleg did not like that idea at first. But during the Dreyfus case in France, one of his Christian friends became increasingly patriotic, and he taught Fleg to realize that one must cling to the traditions which one inherits and that as one is loyal to those, one can find his place in the world. Fleg began to realize that there is something which makes a Frenchman closer to another Frenchman than, let us say, to a German; that there is something which makes a Belgian feel closer towards a Belgian than towards a Russian; and that makes an Italian feel more friendly towards an Italian than towards an Austrian. That something is the link that unites us with the ages,—it is something that attaches us to all that is precious in the past.

Fleg discovered, during the Dreyfus affair, even as another great Jew, Dr. Theodor Herzl, discovered during that same period, that there is "a bond between Israel's past and [his] own empty soul." Fleg tells us that he came to realize then "that anti-Semitism had only one seemingly valid ground: "The determination of Jews to remain Jews," and he finds that this determination is justified by the facts of history. He determines to be a Jew, he returns to Jewry and to Judaism,

and after a period of intense study he discovers that he can be nothing else. In a tremendously eloquent passage, he gives us his reasons for being a Jew :

"I am a Jew because born of Israel and having lost it, I felt it revive within me more alive than I am myself.

"I am a Jew because born of Israel, and having found it again, I would have it live after me even more alive than it is within me.

"I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands no abdication of my mind.

"I am a Jew because the faith of Israel asks every possible sacrifice of my soul.

"I am a Jew because in all places where there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps.

"I am a Jew because in every age when the cry of despair is heard the Jew hopes.

"I am a Jew because the message of Israel is the most ancient and the most modern.

"I am a Jew because Israel's promise is a universal promise.

"I am a Jew because for Israel the world is not finished; men will complete it.

"I am a Jew because for Israel man is not yet created; men are creating him.

"I am a Jew because Israel places Man and his Unity above nations and above Israel itself.

"I am a Jew because above Man, image of the Divine Unity, Israel places the Unity which is divine."

Fleg writes this statement for his grandson, who is not yet born. He sees himself as the direct

heir of, and the latest link with the countless generations of aspiring, faithful souls of Israel, and he continues:

"And I said to myself; from that far distant father to my very own father, all these fathers have transmitted a truth to me, which ran in their blood, which runs in my blood; and must I not transmit it with my blood to those of my blood?"

"Will you accept it, my child? Will you transmit it? Perhaps you will want to desert it. Then it may be for a greater truth if there be one. I could not then reproach you. It would be my fault; for I could not have handed it on to you as I received it. But whether you abandon it, or whether you treasure it, Israel will march on unto the end of days."

This, my friends, is the answer. It is the discovery of one who had lost his moorings; who found himself after a while and regained his Judaism. Most of us, fortunately, have never lost our moorings and in consequence have gained and increased constantly, the joy, the happiness, the peace of soul which come with loyalty.

But there are others,—there are those who are ashamed of their Jewishness,—there are those who would remove from their lives all vestiges of Jewishness,—those who frankly seek assimilation without realizing the ignominy and the cowardice that are involved in death through suicide. Sometimes I become very angry with them, and then again I pity them, for as they seek assimilation and escape, they are trying to cast something away whilst they have nothing else to sustain

them. For, you see, they cast their Jewishness away,—they get nothing in its place. They repudiate the one; they never possess anything else. They uproot themselves and are never transplanted. And if they are transplanted, by chance, then the very soil into which they seek to be transplanted becomes inhospitable to them. There are people, intellectuals, who are like Walter Lipmann, the editor of the *New York World*, a Jew, who wrote a significant book called, "A Preface to Morals", and used a verse from the *Book of Psalms* as a sort of introduction to a part of his book. The verse is: "The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone." But he attributes it to the *Book of Luke*! He had never read the Psalms! He is totally unfamiliar with the Jewish ritual. He did not know that verse except as he saw it in the New Testament. He read the Bible of others—he never knew his own. It is very much like if I were to quote the sentiment, "All men are created free and equal" and said that I read it in the "New York American" or in a Bridgeport newspaper, instead of in the Declaration of Independence.

Or, there are people who believe that children must not be brought up to any religious group loyalty, but that they should be given a chance without prejudice to choose their own religious affiliations when they grow up. And I have known such *Jewish* parents who have proceeded to give the children religious guidance under

Presbyterian auspices, so as to be certain that the children would not be prejudiced in favor of Judaism.

Or, there are some Jewish people, who are interested in the study of Comparative Religion. They would like to compare Judaism with Christianity, or with the different sects in Christianity, but they have never yet discovered their own religion, Judaism, and know not what it stands for. And yet they begin with Ethical Culture; they begin with Unitarianism; they begin with Voodooism; they begin with all kinds of Hindu Cults. It never occurs to them that they might start with their own. They seek escape from Judaism because they say it is inadequate, when, as a matter of fact, they have never discovered it.

But apart from all this, I submit to the consideration of the uncomfortable Jews, the wisdom, the advisability of being rooted somewhere, of belonging and having the sense of security which comes with such belonging. I admit that sometimes it is hard to be a Jew, but hard as it is, it is always easier than being what one is not. Heine, the great German poet, was a Jew. In his youthful days, prompted by ambition no less than by a sense of frivolity, he forsook his religion. But all through his life Heine never found himself, and at the end, in his agony and pain, he realized what it was that troubled him: he forsook that which was his, and he never belonged anywhere else. And when he made this discovery,

aware that it was too late to return, from his mattress grave, he sang words that were indescribably pathetic and tragic:

"Keine Messe wird man singen,
Keinen Kaddish wird man sagen;
Nichts gesagt und nichts gesungen
Wird an meinen Sterbetagen."

"No Mass will be sung,
No Kaddish will be said;
Nothing said and nothing sung,
Will be on the anniversaries of my death."

For, you see, Heine recognized the tragedy of his life. He left the one—Judaism, and never became part of the other. He ceased to be a Jew; he never became another. And between the discarded and the unattained, he found himself a lonely tragic figure. He knew the full significance of the "Judenschmerz", the pain of being a Jew, especially for those who would escape, the tragedy of those who are the empty souls of Israel.

My dear people, in the cycle of sermons which I preached in this holy-day season I tried to have a development, a consecutive thought. I began on the Sabbath before Rosh Hashanah with the story of the watchman describing the horrors of the night of Israel's present experience, and pleaded then for the building up in our midst of that inner resistance which will make it possible for us to face life, and to face it worthily as Jews. I continued, then, on Rosh Hashanah

Eve, with a plea that we forsake our immediate environments for a while, so that as we ascend the heights of ideas, of dreams and visions, we may become familiar with the eternal verities of life. I urged then that we apply the ideals which we have beheld on the hills of vision to the life of the Jewish Main Street; that there we eliminate if we can, the twin curses of indifference and complacency which are stalking through our midst. Tonight I plead with you to realize the importance of loyal adherence to the group of which we are a part,—even as on the morrow I will attempt to bring to you something of the glory and the beauty and the challenge of "the greatest romance in history."

We are a people surrounded. We are a people entrapped. We are a people embattled. But, as Aime Palliere said the other day at a gathering of Jewish youth, "we must learn to fight, not only against something, but also for something." We must fight for God, for truth, for ideals, or to put it in our own Jewish phraseology, we must fight for God, for Torah, for prophetic truth. We must fight, and not only against anti-Semitism, against oppression, against ignorance, against injustice, but for the health, for the vigor, for the consecrated devotion of Israel, who is the vehicle of prophecy, who is the bearer of truth, who is the servant of God. Let us live fully. Let us live truly as Jews. Let us be happy in the privilege which is ours of being what we are and of the

opportunity that might be ours of being Jews on the highest and noblest of planes. If we live in this way, then, of a certainty, for us, "Keine Messe wird man singen"—"no Mass will be sung" because we will choose not to have it thus, but Kaddish, the immemorial Jewish doxology, will be said by a faithful, grateful and noble people for lives that will be so loyal, so consecrated, so exalted as to have blessed and strengthened others whilst they lived luminous lives, aglow with faith and loyalty and astir with endeavor!

THE GREATEST ROMANCE IN HISTORY


BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on Atonement Day, 5691 (October 2, 1930).
at Temple Beth Israel, Hartford, Conn.

THE GREATEST ROMANCE IN HISTORY

A Yom Kippur Sermon

AST winter it was the privilege of Hartford people to greet in our midst Miss Evangeline Booth, the Commander of the Salvation Army in America. She spoke at a great meeting held at the Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall, and her theme was, "The Greatest Romance in History." In her address she told of the rise and growth of the Salvation Army, of its service and its influence, of its aim and its achievements. It was a memorable address, intensely dramatic, forceful and moving.

Yet, as I listened to that utterance which finely described a great contemporary movement as "The Greatest Romance in History", somehow I could not go along with the speaker. The Salvation Army, as Commander Booth told its tale, is doubtless a romance, and a great romance, and

my participation in that meeting was my acknowledgment of this fact. But, "the *greatest* romance in history," is an appellation that belongs elsewhere. I felt it then, I feel it now. For a careful and thoughtful reading of history reveals the fact, that without any question or doubt, the greatest romance in history is the story of the Jew. It is a story writ in "blood and fire" not in one generation or one age or one century. It is the story of a continuous adventure and unceasing martyrdom of a people, whose history begins in remote antiquity, and whose future projects itself into the dimness of the unborn years. It is a tale of great lights and deepening shadows. It is a tale of great ascensions, deep declines and nobler reascensions. It is the tale of an emergent people rising, falling and rising yet higher; of a people dedicated to an ideal, stumbling in its sin, soaring on to dizzying spiritual heights, a people unconquerable, perpetually going on in the face of difficulties innumerable, over obstacles seemingly insuperable, a people touched by all others and in touch with others, yet essentially a people dwelling uniquely alone.

If ancient lineage and descent from it constitutes a claim to aristocracy, then is the Jew today *the* aristocrat amongst the civilized peoples of the earth. If nobility is the patent of those whose lives and service bear the marks of worth and beauty and achievement—then has the Jew a claim to the highest patents of nobility. If the

promulgation of ideals—sweeping and compelling, if devotion to those ideals and life dedicated to their fulfillment entitles one to the acclaim and respect and admiration of his fellows, then is the Jew of history the creditor of civilization. And when one reads the tale of this people, of its ideals, of its vision, of its life and its service, of its sacrifice and its martyrdom during the long ages that it has played its part upon the stage in the drama of human progress, then one is constrained in all fairness to acknowledge that here is Romance, and that this romance is the only one of its kind in human history!

For what is Romance? The dictionary defines it as that which appears strange and fascinating, that which appears heroic, that which partakes even of the nature of the mysterious. And I submit to you, dear friends, that I know of no tale more fascinating than is that of the Jew, that I know of no epic more heroic than is the epic of the Jew, that I know of nothing in human history which of mystery, of incomprehensibleness, has more than the account of the emergence and being and survival of the Jew!

Consider the story.

Out of Chaldean obscurity a tribal chieftain emerges and settles on the plains of Canaan. He leaves home, friends, contacts, prestige and goes forth upon a pilgrimage in search not of wealth or conquest or power. He is troubled by a new concept of life. He is lured by a new and an un-

heard of ideal. He considers himself and his progeny to be destined to what? "And be thou a blessing," this is his task. To bless mankind, that "all the families of earth be blessed in thee and through thee," this his destiny and fate.

And since that remote day, from Abraham the Pioneer, through Moses the Lawgiver; through David the Nation-Builder; through the Prophets with their flaming message of Justice, Mercy, Holiness and Peace, Truth and Righteousness; through the Priestly Scribes and Lay Rabbis; through the long list of academicians, grammarians, logicians, philosophers, poets, scientists; in every land and under every flag, wherever the human mind was active, wherever the soul of man was awake, wherever the light of knowledge pierced the sable darkness of ignorance—there the Jew was ever found, giving of himself, of his mind, of his soul, to the unfolding processes of advancing civilization, blessing mankind, blessing the families of the earth.

Behold, some of his gifts:

To mankind—he gave the Bible, the inspiring and ennobling record of his soul's adventure, of his soul's quest after God and the knowledge of the way of life.

To Christendom—he gave its Saviour and God.

To the Mohammedan world—he gave the sources and inspiration which found expression in the Koran.

To Art and Music—he gave the impetus of inspirational motifs and themes.

To Literature—he gave creators and interpreters.

To Drama—he brought enthusiasm, talent and enterprise.

To Philosophy—he brought a discerning taste, a keen intellect, and daring adventurers.

To Science—he gave some of its most fascinating High Priests.

To Medicine—some of its creative and ingenious disciples.

To Business—genius.

To Jurisprudence—he brought an acumen, a quickness of discernment, an insight, a readiness of understanding, which centuries of Talmudic study and *pilpul* (dialectics) have developed and made keen.

Everywhere, in every field of endeavor, Israel's sons and daughters made their contribution. In whatever position of honor, of danger, of trust, among mankind's embattled hosts in the war against ignorance and for progress, the Jew was found, acquitting himself nobly, sometimes leading, often following loyally, but ever serving, ever giving of himself, always living truly and gloriously, always fulfilling the task assigned to Abraham and his kindred: "Be thou a blessing!"

This is Romance, the kind that sends one's Jewish blood coursing a bit faster through one's veins, the romance which helps to straighten out

the back that is bent and should give to the shame-faced, some of the pride of being which makes the difference between self-respect and self-abasement.

But this survey so far has touched upon only one aspect of Jewish experience. I have spoken of what the Jew has contributed and where he has contributed, but that is not sufficiently descriptive of the glory which is Jewishness. Consider the faith of the Jew, its humble beginnings, its rise to glorious heights. For our people have risen out of petty tribalism into a united nation; out of Bedouin obscurity and the Arabian desert into a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation"; indeed, into the priesthood of the universal God and into the prophetic missionaries to the world.

And in that rise one perceives a remarkable evolution. We can see the Jewish faith developing out of the conception of family and clan deities into the noble concept of ethical monotheism. It was not a sudden rise. It took centuries of development and growth. But think of the courage of conviction, think of the obstinacy in perseverance, think of the pride in persistence, yes, of the *audacity of faith* displayed by our people through all the centuries! Consider it, and we, the most recent representatives of that ancient people, might well stand in wonder, in awe, and in admiration. For here is the very essence of romance, here is fascination, here is mystery, here is courage, here is heroism! There is noth-

ing quite like it to equal it in history for content and duration, for persistence and achievement!

I have touched on the contribution which the Jew has made through the centuries. I have also touched on the evolution of his faith and his sublime loyalty to it. There is a third angle that one must view to realize the romance of Jewish experience. I am thinking now of the physical experiences of our people. I am thinking of the journey our people has made through all lands and climes, through so many ages and under so many and such varied circumstances.

Consider it from the time that our people received their ordination at Sinai and you will notice that they have been almost constantly on the defensive. In the wilderness they were attacked by sundry tribes. And after the conquest and settlement of Canaan they were subjected again and again to the efforts of the peoples of the earth to destroy them. Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, each in her hour of might and power, attempted to crush out of existence that small nationality on the banks of the Mediterranean; but in vain!

And as one casts his glance over the centuries and the ages, one finds Israel, like that little vessel of which the Rabbis spoke, tossed from the crest of one furious wave unto that of another. The Roman conquest came and the Jew went forth upon his long journey, driven from post to pillar, homeless and friendless, through the ages

a mysterious, misunderstood phenomenon. From the year 70, when Jerusalem was finally captured by the Romans, through the dreary centuries of wandering and persecution; from under the iron heel of brutal Rome into the hellish fire of the *auto de fe* lit by the Spanish inquisition; through the nightmare of the middle ages; through the physical persecutions of Roumania to the massacres of Tzarist Russia; from the anti-Semitism of Germany to the Dreyfus case of civilized France and the boycott and massacres of liberated Poland; through prejudice; through discrimination; through abuse and humiliation, Israel, crucified a thousand times, comes marching down the centuries. Stripped of his land, stripped of all that makes life attractive, through gallows and sword, through fire and water, behold the ancient, the eternal Jew, coming through the mists of the past. His land they could conquer. Him they could exile. But his soul, the soul set aflame by that faith of which I spoke a moment ago—conquer that? Never! That soul moved and urged and commanded him through the ages and even today the Jew stands before the world not amongst the conquered, but in a spiritual sense, the conqueror; not the vanquished, but the victor!

I submit to you, my dear people, that in this three-fold aspect of Jewish life and history there is great romance. I spoke of the contributions of the Jew. I spoke of the inspiration of that faith which is the Jew's. I have spoken of the history

of the Jew, of his march down the ages, of his suffering and endurance and victory. Is there anything like it in the annals of human history? It is the romance of a people that is scattered and hounded and yet is united; the romance of a people that unitedly and persistently flung the challenge of its history and ideals into the very teeth of a hostile world; the romance of a people daringly continuing to be uniquely the *protestant* amongst the peoples of the earth!

But you might ask why I speak of all this now. Is it not true that those things on the Jewish Main Street of which we could with reason boast, might very well be taken for granted? And I admit that this is true. But only of the things that are *known* by us! But when a generation has grown up amongst us who know not the glory and the romance of Jewishness; when we have discovered in our midst so many of our own sons and daughters who because they are ignorant frown upon the Jew and his Jewishness; when in our midst there are people who are eager to believe the libelous charges hurled at us by our enemies; when in our midst are found some small groups which have so little decency as to delight in sneering at themselves and to repeat all of the ignorant jibberish with which bigotry has fed the world; when we find Jews, mind you, *Jews* who believe without investigation, without knowledge what the foe says concerning the Jew, and, in a measure, delight to accept that estimate of the

Jew; when there has grown up a group of so-called liberals,—God save the mark!—Jewish “liberals”, so-called, “American Jews” they like to label themselves—who are never secure in their Jewishness except as they are able to whittle away the distinctive part of their Jewishness, people who are never happier than when they are not mistaken for Jews, then I say it is time to speak out anew and to proclaim once again the glory of the heritage which is ours and to fire, if that be possible, the imagination of our own people, with the wondrous tale of our experience, our history and our achievements!

We are the heirs of a noble past. But what is the duty of heirs? Is it that this spiritual wealth of ours should be squandered thoughtlessly, that it should be frittered away and cast aside as though we were drunken sailors on a spree?

We are the heirs of a noble ancestry. Shall we become like unto those modern descendants of ancient lineage in Europe and America who have become decadent, dissipated weaklings, or shall we be the virile heirs of that virile stock?

We are the heirs of Jewish nobility. Shall we be the wastrel sons of those sacrificing, prudent fathers or shall we in ourselves symbolize that worth, that dignity, that value of Jewishness of which our heritage is so eloquent?

We are the heirs of a glorious past. Shall we live merely on the glory of the past and do nothing ourselves, or shall we be the symbols, the liv-

ing, serving, inspired and inspiring symbols, not alone of the glory that was, but of the glory that is, and even more, the harbingers, the forerunners of that greater glory which is yet to be!

Noblesse oblige! As heirs of a noble past and of noble sires, we have obligations which are encumbent upon nobility. We are writing the latest chapter of that romance which stirred and challenged and puzzled the ages. Shall we add a chapter and continue the tale or shall we ignominiously end the tale and write a cowardly "finis" thereto? I take it that ours is the duty to add the chapter and should not that chapter mark the beginning of a new part of the history of the Jew, of a new period and era, one that will bring even greater values to civilization? That is the challenge of the romance I speak of, the greatest romance in history!

I speak of it on the Kippur day because more truly today than at any other time is the Jew a united people. I speak of it today because if ever the Jew feels the consecration of the past and thrills with the mystery and the beauty of his heritage, it is on this day of mystery, this day of awe, this Day of Atonement. For today, even as we stand here, the ages converge upon us; today the centuries meet, even here *in* us, and with us.

From Abraham the Patriarch, in the remote past, to every son of Abraham here today, there is a continuous, an unbroken chain of experience and tradition.

THE GREATEST ROMANCE IN HISTORY

"Heir of all the ages, I,
Heir of all that they have wrought,
All their store of emprise high,
All their wealth of precious thought!

"Every golden deed of theirs
Sheds its lustre on my way;
All their labors, all their prayers,
Sanctify this present day.

"Heir of all that they have earned
By their passion and their tears;
Heir of all that they have learned
Through the weary, toiling years.

"Heir of all the faith sublime
On whose wings they soared to heaven;
Heir of every hope that time
To earth's fainting sons hath given."

And at this moment, those of us whose souls are attuned and whose hearts are not petrified, they of the past and we here now: the millions of our people scattered all over the world, and we here now: the untold generations of the future, and we here now—we become as one, indeed we *are* one people endowed with one soul, with one hope, with one aim, one destiny: "Be thou a blessing"—"In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

My dear people, shall we not go forth then from this service consecrated anew and earnestly resolved that the sacrifices of the past shall not have been made in vain, that the loyalty of the fathers find renewed expression in the hearts and lives of their descendants, that the zeal of the past be the inspiring influence in our lives in the

present and in the lives of our children who are of the future? We shall then not have prayed in vain; we shall then not have met in vain, and our atonement might then be truly an at-one-ment, when we shall be *at one* with our God, *at one* with ourselves, *at one* with our people wherever they may be, and through them *at one* with mankind!

BLAMING
THE OLD TESTAMENT
AGAIN !

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on October 10, 1930, at Temple Beth Israel,
Hartford, Conn.

BLAMING THE OLD TESTAMENT AGAIN !

THERE is a peculiar angle to Christian psychology. Whenever Churchmen would point out the value of the New Testament, whenever they would exalt its spirit and glorify its message, they do not seem to be content with merely making such claims, but for some reason or other so many of them seem to feel the need to "demonstrate" how *superior* this so-called "New Testament" is to the "Old." And when they proceed to demonstrate the superiority of the "New" to the "Old", very frequently the process of such demonstration is that of ignoring the sources whence Jesus and the Apostles drew their spiritual nourishment. They, the demonstrators, ignore the Prophets of Israel and their impassioned pleas for an ethical life. Instead, they proceed to a reading of the narrative passages

of our Bible, and in and with the *early* ethical standards there reflected, when judged by later prophetic standards, they find many flaws, and then exclaim in unctuous righteousness, "Behold the inferior, the terrible Old Testament, and compare with that the glory, the spiritual beauty, the ethical nobility of the New Testament."

That this practice is not unusual is generally known, and that this indulgence is ethically and intellectually of questionable character any one with any knowledge of the facts can readily appreciate. And I suggest that those who have the facts and also a conscience should not and ought not to stoop to that kind of practice.

Let me say at the outset that I do not propose in my address this evening to point out what I believe to be the ethical depressions of the New Testament. I do not have to do it. Doing it would serve no purpose. Besides, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, was not written by one hand, nor was it motivated by one purpose, and it does not reflect the point of view or the ideals of just one generation. The most reverent of the students of the New Testament must admit that not all parts of it are of equal value, and that there are found in the New Testament passages, and ideas are reflected there which centuries of apologetics have been unable adequately and satisfactorily to explain away. As an honest student, I would judge the New Testament, in-

deed any literature, by its best and not its lesser content. I so judge the New Testament, and when I do, I find that the best in the New Testament is older than Christianity, is older than Jesus, and is indeed rooted in that spirit whose source is the Old Testament!

What prompts me to speak on this theme at this time? It has come to my attention that last August (August 19, 1930) at a Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus in Boston one of the foremost of the dignitaries of the Church, in addressing that Convention, attacked some of the bad legislation of the day, and if newspapers' accounts are correct, came to the conclusion that some of these laws and statutes "*still indicate the spirit of the Old Testament and not that of the New*".

As used here, "the spirit of the Old Testament" is, therefore, presumed to be a spirit to be avoided. It is a spirit that is reprehensible, something which a civilized society ought to shun.

Now the question immediately forms itself, which is the evil spirit of the Old Testament, of what is it composed? You remember that, according to the New Testament, Jesus came to fulfill the law and not to abrogate it. Now is it this law which Jesus came to fulfill, *the law of the Old Testament*, of Moses and the Prophets, is it that which, in the opinion of this dignitary, is so reprehensible? If the spirit of the Old

Testament is so baneful, somehow it is hard to forget that the Decalogue is part of this spirit. Would this Church teacher convey the idea that the Ten Commandments are to be avoided?

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is *Old Testament* teaching, part of the legitimate, authentic spirit of that Old Testament. Does this Church leader mean to say that this doctrine is to be discarded?

“Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might” is part of the doctrine which reveals the spirit of the Old Testament. Is that to be forgotten?

The finest definition of the religious life is that which is found in the Old Testament: “He hath told thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord thy God doth require of thee, only to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” Is that so reprehensible that it ought to be eliminated from the concepts of civilized beings?

It is said in the Old Testament “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all of God’s Holy Mountain”. It is said in the same Old Testament that “Justice is to roll down like water and Righteousness like a mighty stream”. It is said in this Old Testament that the day will come when “Men will dwell each under his vine and under his fig tree with none to make him afraid”. Is the

Church or are the spokesmen for the Church ready to say or to admit that these hopes and these longings, these ideals reflecting as they do the spirit of the Old Testament, have no longer any value or significance for men, and that these do not reflect the spirit of the New Testament or the ideals of the Church?

Truly, which is the spirit of the Old Testament? I find it in the concept in the Book of Jonah whose main burden is that God loves all men regardless of creed or position or knowledge, and even the beasts of the field. I find it in the doctrine of love, love human and Divine, as enunciated by Hosea, and in his challenging call to a single moral standard of life. I find the spirit of the Old Testament in the concept of holiness, useful, social holiness as enunciated by Isaiah. I find it in the ideal of selfless service of the suffering servant of the Lord, he who serves though he suffers, he who suffers and yet serves, enunciated by the Second Isaiah and appropriated though misapplied by the Church. These are part of the spirit of the Old Testament, and did this leader of the Church mean to say that this spirit is inadequate, unacceptable, and that the New Testament replaces the glory of the spirit which is here reflected by the Old?

And I am tempted to go a step further and in all honesty ask the question: When you speak of the superiority of the spirit of the New Testa-

ment over that of the Old, pray what is it in the former that is superior to the latter? Where may it be found, and if found may it not be discovered in the teachings and life and practices of that generation (and of the preceding generations) which provided the spiritual sustenance of Jesus and his Apostles? And if one go in search of the exemplification of this superior spirit of the New Testament, if one would go to examine the lives, through history, of the devotees of this superior spirit of the New Testament for evidence of that spirit in their deeds, I suggest that one might produce some rather damaging historical evidence for the non-existence of that spirit. . . .

Nor is this incident in Boston the only one that provoked this comment on my part. In the July number of the *Forum* magazine there appeared an article, from the pen of a newspaper correspondent named John T. Flynn, entitled "God's Gold". In that article the author points out that what he considers the anti-social practices of some of the wealthy men in American history, men like Daniel Drew, John E. Serles, John D. Rockefeller, John Wanamaker, and others, may all be traced back to the fact that these men were reared in their childhood on the stories of the Old Testament! He tells us "that the ethics of the Old Testament are bad ethics . . . The New Testament is infinitely richer in spirituality and in elevated philosophy". Then he proceeds to select some of the Old Testament

characters or "heroes", as he calls them, as horrible examples. "I do not know a worse collection of heroes to hold up for the imitation of the young mind than those early Hebrew gentlemen". And he continues: "These men were not the villains of the stories, they were not the black sheep, they were the Prophets of the Lord". Then he proceeds to tell us "the whole emphasis of the Old Testament is laid on the rituals, as well as on the human passions with which God Himself was perpetually tortured". God is pictured as frenzied, selfish, jealous, pitiless, a strutting, swaggering, menacing Deity, a God whose religion was "pretty much a matter of burnt offerings, of killing the bullock properly, separating the fat and washing the inwards according to the Law, a religion of hosannas and praisegiving; a religion of glorification, a moronic kind of religion", etc., etc.

One can hardly characterize the rank knavery of this writer. Think of it, to say these things in characterization of the teachings of the so-called Old Testament, and not to be aware of that great first chapter of Isaiah and its vehement protest against mere ritual!

"Hear the word of the Lord. . .

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? . . .

I delight not in the blood

Of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

Who hath required this at your hand? . . .

I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed seasons

BLAMING THE OLD TESTAMENT AGAIN !

My soul hateth;
They are a burden unto Me;
I am weary to bear them.
And when ye spread forth your hands,
I will hide Mine eyes from you;
Yea, when ye make many prayers,
I will not hear;
Your hands are full of blood.
Wash you, make you clean,
Put away the evil of your doings
From before Mine eyes.
Cease to do evil;
Learn to do well;
Seek justice, relieve the oppressed,
Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Imagine the state of mind, the *honesty* of a man who proceeds to give us a picture of some of the early narratives found in the Book of Genesis and to say not one word about the great Prophets of Israel, not a word about their social message, not a word about their objections to mere ritualism, not a word about their ethical stress! Flynn speaks of bullocks and sacrifices as the religion of the Old Testament and forgets the social doctrine, the social message which is found imbedded, and like a golden thread runs through, the entire collection of books! Listen to this out of the 19th Chapter of Leviticus, a passage immediately following a paragraph on sacrifices:

"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corner of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou

gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I am the Lord your God. Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by My name falsely, so that thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of a hired servant shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but thou shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am the Lord."

As I read this man's vituperation, this question came to me. John T. Flynn is a Christian who presumably knows his New Testament. He was reared on it. And he assures us that the New Testament on which he was reared, reflects a spirit that is more beautiful, more spiritual than is that of the Old. If, then, Flynn having been reared on this New Testament is guilty—as he is!—of such malice, of such deliberate misrepresentation as is demonstrated in his article, then by his own standard and assurance the New

Testament spirit is demonstrated in this article of his. And I ask whether the New Testament would thus be justified as a document of superlative spirituality, of ethical inspiration, etc.?

No, I would not be guilty of this man's sin. I *do* know better. I know that the New Testament is not at fault. What is back of this man's sin is that immoral, that irreligious arrogance which justifies the means, whatever they be, when it believes that the end is advantageous to itself. It is a sin against which the Old Testament *thundered* its protest! "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain, for I shall not hold him guiltless who taketh My name in vain"; and again, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour".

I voice my protest against the sins of these men and their kind. It is time they knew better, if, indeed, they do not already know. Even in business higher standards prevail. And though a man greatly love the mother of his children he need not and ought not be unjust and unfair to his own mother. This, it seems to me, is elementary decency. . . .

And as to our Bible, this precious book of our people, I say to it:

Book of my soul!

There is a glorious spirit revealed through thee. 'Tis the spirit of those who wrote these

narratives and messages, their passion for Justice, their yearning for Love, their groping after God. By that spirit I would live! Thou record-est their stumbling, their falling, their rise. I, too, human like unto them, stumble and fall, but as I hold thee, as I know thee, as I understand thee, I shall learn to rise above the cupidity of men, above the malice of my fellows, above the ignorance of those who should and perhaps do know better, above the hatred of those pledged to love. . . .

Book of my soul!

Guide me, inspire me, and may I be worthy of possessing thee as thou art worthy of being possessed! Thine, oh Old Testament, is the spirit of man risen, thine is the glory of man redeemed, thine is the beauty of man sanctified. Be thou the light on my journey, my beacon on the hill!

Book of my soul!

Whatever others say of thee, I know thee as thou art, and not all the malice, not all the libels, not all the ignorance of the ages will enstrange me from thee!

Book of my soul!

Thou art mine; we are betrothed; yea, we are wedded, the one unto the other. For, indeed, is it not true, as the inspired mystic said it, "Israel and the Torah are one!" I do love thee,

my precious heritage, and I mean to preserve thee and to continue to grasp thee as thou wert through all the ages, like unto a Tree of Life dispensing joy and bliss to all who abide by thine exalted spirit. I mean to walk in the paths illumined by thee, for all thy paths are ways of pleasantness, and all thy paths are peace.

So help me God !

Amen!

“ IF I WERE A JEW ! ”


A Reply to John Haynes Holmes

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on January 2, 1931, at Temple Beth Israel,
Hartford, Connecticut.

“ IF I WERE A JEW ! ”

R. JOHN HAYNES HOLMES, the Minister of the Community Church in the City of New York, is in my opinion to be classed amongst those whom the Rabbis of old called *chasidei oomoth haolam*, the pious, the spiritually minded, the saintly amongst the world's peoples. He is a true and proven *ohev Yisroel*, Judeophile, or lover of Israel. In recognition of his friendship the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York last spring conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, and I may add that Dr. Holmes' timely protest against the recent White Paper with reference to Palestine issued by Lord Passfield, was one of the most tremendous outbursts of righteous indignation which that "great betrayal" called forth in the world.

I say this by way of introduction because I want to make the point that when Dr. Holmes speaks of the Jews and especially to the Jews, whether we agree with him or disagree, we do listen respectfully, because we know that whatever he says, his are the words of a friend and must be taken as such.

The other day John Haynes Holmes preached a sermon in his pulpit on the theme "If I Were a Jew!" The sermon is now printed and I have

it before me. I have read it carefully and thoughtfully and find it, in many respects, a truly brilliant effort.

He makes five points in this sermon. First, he says that if he were a Jew he "would be proud to be a Jew"; second, if he were a Jew he "would let people know that I was a Jew"; third, if he were a Jew he "would live the life of a Jew"; fourth, if he were a Jew he "would claim his full heritage from the past", and he adds: "by this I mean, very specifically, the person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth"; and fifth, if he were a Jew, he "would claim the fullness of promise in the future." By this he means, as he says, "specifically, that I would be a Zionist."

Now in discussing these various points I shall leave the fourth point, that as to Jesus of Nazareth, for the end. And I may say that with the exception of this fourth point, it is not at all hard to agree with Dr. Holmes. For he, the Gentile, points out to Jews their path of duty, and what he says is only that which Rabbis and other Jewish teachers have been saying for generations. But coming as it does from him, it comes with particular force.

Taking his points, then, one by one, let us touch on the first one now. He says:

"If I were a Jew, I would be proud to be a Jew. I would be proud of the tradition of my tribe, the longest tradition that has survived into the modern world; I would be proud of the history of my people,

the most heroic, if also the most painful, history that lies recorded in the annals of mankind; I would be proud of the achievements of my family, which run in an unbroken span from Isaiah, the greatest prophet of ancient times to Albert Einstein, the greatest thinker of modern times."

This is a timely word, for there are Jews in our times who are in great need of just such admonition as Dr. Holmes gives. There are Jews who lament their Jewishness, who would fain be someone other than themselves. I call them our *nervous* Jews, our fearful Jews, Jews with a self-abasing complex, Jews who pity themselves for the hard luck that has befallen them in being born Jews. This word of Dr. Holmes might be given to such as a stimulant to them, because it represents the estimate of those better, nobler spirits in Christendom, who are, one likes to think in hopeful moments, the harbingers of a better, brighter day that is coming.

And Dr. Holmes' second point is, that, if he were a Jew, he would not deny his racial identity and character. He recognizes, of course, that it is hard to be a Jew, circumstances being what they are, and furthermore that it is easy for one who stands without Jewish life, for one who is not subject to the restrictions pressed upon Jews by a hostile world, to advise the proud assertion of racial identity.

"I can understand how a Jew, in his moment of weakness, can seek to escape from the burden of suffering long laid upon his tribe. But I find it

difficult to understand why this Jew in the hour of his strength does not see the challenge that is offered to the best that is within him by the peculiar destiny of his people. Who is he that he should ask to be excused from the disabilities of his race, and thus delivered from the sufferings which his fathers did not refuse to endure?”

He points out that some of the great souls of mankind have chosen to stand with the oppressed and that in that choice, their heroism and their nobility were demonstrated. And he continues:

“But the Jew is already there in the haunts of misery and oppression. By right of birth he is endowed with this opportunity to share the degradation of his fellows which other men must seek. Just by standing by his kindred and enduring with them the discomfitures and limitations of their lot, he is fulfilling within himself the highest and holiest mission of humankind. Think of his seeking to escape, while his kinsmen, and millions of other helpless souls are still in prison! ‘It is the Jew’s destiny to suffer’, said a Jewish friend to me. His destiny to suffer, that he may understand injustice and hatred, that he may taste oppression and rise up against it, that he may discover prejudice and dream of brotherhood! * * * Who is there worthy of the name of manhood, who would forfeit the glory for the sake of escaping the doom?”

How timely this word is! There are Jews in our midst, Jews who flatter themselves, or disgrace themselves, by thinking of themselves as being “the other kind” of Jews. Whatever they may mean by that, I know the meaning I put upon that phrase, “the other kind”. They are the unkindly Jews, unkindly to their own. They

are the disloyal Jews who forsake their own. They are the betraying Jews who desert their own. They are the ones who add to the burden of their brethren by refusing to shoulder part of the responsibility of Jewishness and by that refusal hope themselves to escape their share in Jewish living. I know such and you do. They are a pathetic, pitiful group, but they exist, and this word of Dr. Holmes ought to be taken to them. For, again, coming as it does from a self-respecting and outstanding teacher in Christendom, it might reveal them to themselves in their own pitiful light. A needed, timely word it is!

The third point he makes is that if he were a Jew he would live the life of a Jew, he would move in Jewish society, he would be active in Jewish interests, he would belong to Jewish clubs, he would keep contact with Jewish synagogues. And he says that he would do this, first, because it is human thus to live, and second, because

"There is something precious in the Jewish tradition which the Jewish world cannot afford to lose, and that as an inheritor of this tradition I am appointed, so to speak, to transmit to the future what I have received from the past. And I would do this thing not only because of what I owe to my people and to the world, but also because of what I owe to myself. For I confess that I have little sympathy with the Jew, who while not hiding or denying his Judaism, still tries to live in the Gentile world and as much like Gentiles as possible. As though it meant anything to a Jew to belong to a Fifth Avenue church or a Long Island club! Is there not some-

thing essentially unworthy in this attempt to live the life of other people, as though one were ashamed of one's country or one's home."

To be sure, Dr. Holmes adds, that if he were a Jew he would not confine himself to the Jewish world, he would not turn his home into a Ghetto. He would be "a man amongst men", "a citizen among his fellow-citizens."

"If I were a Jew, I would walk freely and openly among my fellows. Always a Jew, I would still always be a citizen, a neighbor, a comrade, an American, a human being. In my person would the tribe of Israel and the tribes of earth unite, and mankind thus truly be made one."

Now as to the first part of this point in his address, again one must comment upon the timeliness of the admonition. For, again and again one encounters the type of Jew whom not only we, the loyal ones in Israel, condemn, but whom even the self-respecting Christian must needs condemn. Every honorable man must condemn fraud, and the Jew who would escape his Jewish life is neither honest nor honorable. The Christian world can make a genuine contribution to Jewish life by reminding some Jews occasionally that the useful Jew in a world of change is the steadfast Jew, the Jew who so lives as to deepen his heritage, to strengthen his Jewishness, for his own sake, to be sure, but more especially, so that he may have something better and finer to contribute to the totality of life about him. What has the renegade Jew to give, having forsworn

the past and not at home in the new? What has the unaffiliated Jew to give seeing that he refuses the nurture which attachment to Jewish life offers? Whence his inspiration? Whence will he draw those cultural, spiritual, ideal stimuli which will make him a true contributor to the larger life of mankind?

And as to the last part of this point made by Dr. Holmes, namely, that the Jew while preserving his Jewish contacts would still walk abroad "a man amongst men" and so on, he realizes, I am sure, that that is the case certainly for a great many of American Jews. We do seek to escape the limitations of Ghettoism, we do crave the opportunity to live as men amongst men, we do seek contacts with the larger world. Wherever a door is opened, what Jew would not enter it, and wherever a hand is offered, who of us would not clasp it? But is not this very grasping of opportunity one of the objections of the Gentile world against us? And are not discrimination and exclusion by the Gentiles an answer to Dr. Holmes' advice, and are not the "Gentiles Only" and "No Jews Need Apply" signs and announcements the indication both of the Jew's readiness to be in, and of the world's as of the Christian's refusal to admit him?

Skiping the fourth point, that about Jesus, I go to his fifth point, in which he says that if he were a Jew, he would claim the fullness of his promise in the future and would be a Zionist.

He would be a Zionist, he says, because 160,000 of our people are at this moment in dire need in Palestine and he would help them in their distress. He would be a Zionist because the recent blow of Great Britain at Zionism is a blow even more truly "at every Jew high and low in every quarter of the world." "If you are a Jew, the cause of Zionism is your cause at this hour if it never was before, and you should make it your own if you would not be a traitor to your race." He would be a Zionist because he sees in Zion the fulfillment of the age-long hopes of the Jew, "the dream fulfilled of patient and persecuted Israel", and he continues: "Zion is the answer to the hunger of the Jewish heart through generations of distress and agony for peace and safety. Now that the Homeland is in sight, should it not be received and welcomed by all who boast the heritage of Israel's race and faith?" And he would be a Zionist "for the sake of mankind" as well as for the sake of Israel. For, Zionism, "is seeking to build a new fabric of society out of the willing lives of humble workers on the land from the bottom up * * * If I were a Jew, I would cherish this vision, and out of love for my fellow-men everywhere, give my life to making it come true."

This, too, is a timely and needed word, especially in view of the fact that there are still so many, many Jews, especially among the emancipated, Westernized Jews, they to whom in partic-

ular John Haynes Holmes speaks, who stand aloof from this great, compelling and truly transfiguring movement in modern Jewish life. It is pathetic to see so many afraid of Zionism not on the ground of principle which, however one may disagree with it, one might at least understand, but who remain aloof out of an ignorance of what it is all about, out of fear of themselves, out of an unjustified sense of insecurity and of that which is strongly suggestive of cowardice. Zionism is not the cry of the defeated Jew, it is the answer of a Jewry that is unyielding. Zionism is the answer the self-conscious Jew gives to a world hostile and unfriendly. Zionism is the answer of men who would refute the charge of Jewish pariahism, it is the symbol of Jewish selfhood and of Jewish dignity as well as of faith in the certainty and continuity and progressiveness of the Jewish future. The time has come for Jews who were fearful to cast aside their fears, and proudly to accept the cheer and the consolation, the promise and the glory of this movement of Jewish resurgence and renaissance in which it should be and is our privilege to be determining and creative factors!

Coming now to the fourth point made by Dr. Holmes, which I left for discussion at the end, I should say that Dr. Holmes in saying that were he a Jew he would claim his full heritage in the person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth does not at all urge conversion. Indeed, he says, and

truly, that "the final insult to a Jew is to ask him to become a Christian and the final treason of a Jew is to accept the invitation. I see no more reason why a Jew should become a Christian than Gandhi should become a Christian. The Church has no monopoly of the highest virtues and the noblest dedications of mankind." But he does plead for the restoration of Jesus to his people. He speaks of him as our "greatest son." He labels him the "greatest of the Jewish prophets." He speaks of him from the background of idealization which is entirely intelligible when one remembers that Dr. John Haynes Holmes, for all his liberalism, is a product of his environment as the Jews are of theirs, and that no matter how far he has gone from orthodox Christianity, his background is nevertheless Christian. He reflects an idealization of the person and significance of Jesus which one finds amongst all liberals in Christianity.

I recall that some years ago I read Dr. Holmes' book entitled "New Churches for Old" which was a discussion of the Community Church and its principles. And even there, as I recall it, as the author drew the picture of the new church, there was little there that was unacceptable to liberal Jews. Indeed, in speaking of it at that time, I asked why build the new church, the Synagog is here, and there was little difference between them. I asked why should Jews go to the new church when Dr. Holmes could find himself at

home in the Liberal Synagog? And yet in that book Dr. Holmes stressed the fact that Jesus would be the keystone of the arch of the new structure. This is an attitude which is also held by Unitarians and Universalists.

The simple answer to all of this is that Jewishly informed Jews cannot idealize Jesus and will not do it, because to us Jews, Jesus is just one of the Jews, a Jew whose name became great. We are proud of that greatness and we *do* claim him as a son of Israel, but for us to describe him as the "greatest son" or as the "greatest of our prophets", we don't do it for the very simple reason that from our point of view he just isn't "the greatest" in any sense. Perhaps "the best known", but not the *greatest*! There was nothing in his teachings that Jews did not have before him, there was nothing in it that was original, nothing that his own teachers in the Pharisaic Synagog did not have. There was nothing of value taught by him that we did not have then, or do not have now in the Synagog. There was nothing in the teachings of Jesus as represented by the New Testament that to our Jewish view excels the daring vision of Isaiah, the religious challenge of Micah, the entrancing message and personality of Jeremiah, the vigor and sturdiness of Amos or the tenderness of Hosea. Jesus did catch the fancy of the world, perhaps, as our other sons did not. Frankly, we wonder why that happened. We wonder why the ado about

Jesus. We are not displeased, but we do not understand. We are not displeased because we feel that in the significance which Jesus acquired in the lives of the millions and millions and millions through all the centuries of Christendom there is the fulfillment of the promise unto the Patriarch Abraham: "Go forth and be thou a blessing, * * * in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

And so we do not go into ecstasy over Jesus, because taking him as a member of the household of Israel, there was nothing unusual about him. John Haynes Holmes, reared as a Christian, has indeed gone very far in his approach to truth with reference to Jesus, when he denies the Christology which the Church presented through the centuries. But the romanticism and the idealization of Jesus through the ages, is in Holmes' blood, it is part of his heritage, and try though he would, he seems unable to understand our point of view, because of this background.

In a sermon which he preached immediately after this one I am discussing, a sermon entitled "If Christians Were *Christians!*", Dr. Holmes speaking of Jesus described him as "the greatest man who ever lived", and again, the "greatest spiritual genius who has ever lived." He speaks of the words of Jesus as containing "the ultimate solution of every problem of human existence." He says, "again and again I am persuaded, as I read the story of Jesus, that there never lived a

man so winsome and so powerful, so gentle and so strong, so human in his relations with mankind and so divine in his grasp of the things of the spirit, a man who moved so lightly over the surface of existence, and yet plunged so deep into its depths of spiritual truth, as this man of Nazareth."

Now, when one feels as warmly and as keenly as does Dr. Holmes with reference to Jesus, urging us even "to inscribe the name of Jesus in golden letters" upon the walls of Synagogs, one must stand reverently before such conviction, but we must insist upon our reverent though firm dissent. I repeat what I said once before, *Jewish history is complete without Jesus!* Jesus added nothing to it, and whatever he became to the world at large, to the Synagog he contributed nothing it did not already have!

It is hard for Christians to understand this attitude. Sometimes they resent it. We are sorry, but this is part of our lot, part of our destiny. We stood firm through all the ages. Today the position of Holmes and other Liberals in Christendom is a very marked approach to the point of view which we maintained all the time. The struggle between the Fundamentalists and the Modernists, between the Fosdicks and the Strattons, between the Holmeses and the Mannings, and the constant advance and growth of those who stand on the side of Liberalism, means to me just this, that we, the Jews, are now being ad-

judged right in our position, and whether they agree with us altogether or not, we believe yet that *we still are right*, and we mean to stand by that conviction!

When Dr. Fosdick says that the time has come to give up the religion *about* Jesus and to go back to the religion *of* Jesus, he is saying something which we Jews can understand, for the religion *about* Jesus we repudiated all along. The religion *of* Jesus, what is it but *Judaism*? And the meaning of Judaism, we *do* understand. . . .

And so, with the exception of John Haynes Holmes' enthusiasm for Jesus, which we are glad to see but cannot share, this entire sermon preached by him is a sermon that is friendly as it is beautiful, as fine as it is lofty. With this one exception, it is the sort of a sermon that could be preached in any Synagog, and is, indeed, being preached in most Synagogs by acknowledged Jewish teachers.

We hail John Haynes Holmes as an *ohev Yisroel*, a lover and friend of the Jews. We rejoice to enshrine him in the gallery of Israel's Gentile friends. We are grateful to him for his understanding generally, and for his friendship and coöperation always, and we suggest that he must not become impatient with us for failing to share his enthusiasm in this one instance which I excepted. Surely he, of all men, will continue to grant us the right to differ, the right to be different, the right to be just ourselves!


WHAT DO I ASK OF LIFE ?

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

Preached on November 14, 1930, at Temple Beth Israel,
Hartford, Connecticut.

WHAT DO I ASK OF LIFE ?

E hear so much in these days of "the values of life". One can hardly read a magazine article, or a high school paper, or a Sunday supplement, or an advertisement without having such values thrust upon him. Many and sundry folk are very emphatic in their statements and are very positive of the rightness of their opinions which they state with a definiteness and authoritativeness that are intended to be crushingly conclusive. It occurred to me, therefore, that it might not hurt for me to tell my people what I think *I*, personally, expect of life, what my aims and program of intelligent living are. This discussion may, by its very nature, border perhaps, upon the intimate and the personal, but I venture to indulge in it, in the hope that even in this intimacy of discussion there may be something of helpful value to others.

I worded my question, *What Do I Ask of Life?* and not *What Do We Ask of Life?* because

I am aware that in so many things we do differ, in tastes, in ideals, in standards of life, in background, even in our outlook upon the future do we differ, and what may be acceptable to me or sufficient for me, may not at all satisfy another. I shall, therefore, speak in a personal vein.

My theme, then, is *What Do I Ask of Life?*, and before I proceed to answer this question, I must ask another and answer it: How do I use the word "Life" in this connection, what do I mean by it, what is understood?

As I use the word tonight I understand by it the totality of my experiences as a human being, the physical, the material or economic, the social, the intellectual, the spiritual. I include in my concept of life the totality of my hopes, the sum of my ambitions and longings. I include also the factors what are best described as Self, Society, God. Of all of these is life composed for me.

Having thus defined life, "when I am by myself" what do I ask of it or expect of it?

Approaching the basic, the fundamental factors and building up from the foundation, I ask, first, that that elementary need of life which is *health* be mine. To live, to use whatever gifts life has to offer, to enjoy these, to serve life, one ought to have and must have that physical strength and endurance without which there is no zest to living or endeavor. Health

assures these. And while it is true that many have lived greatly even though they were deprived of good health, they were the exceptional, the rare souls.

I ask for health for myself, but also for my dear ones, for where there is anxiety, where worry and fear enter into life, there, most frequently, also the zest of living, the joy and peace of life are gone. And I feel that I, and you, have a claim upon life for the assurance of such environment, opportunities, and standards of living and security, as might give us the chance to have, to retain, and to enjoy good health.

In the second place, I ask of life the assurance of *economic security*; the creature comforts which worldly means assure. I do not ask or crave for a super-abundance of wealth; I do not need much for the task of living, and, in truth, none else does. But I ask of Life, and I feel that all lives are entitled to it, enough of the worldly goods to give me the enjoyment of the necessary creature comforts, to provide me and my dear ones with the necessities of physical being on the level of security. I ask these, to satisfy my simple physical needs not only; but also to be enabled to indulge in cultural pursuits on the plane of moderation. I ask of Life enough of the world's goods to be enabled to provide my children with an education not for the sake of satisfying false social standards, but for the sake of preparing them for life and usefulness.

I am so constituted that I cannot conceive of being happy merely in possessions, for unless possessions serve, unless they are used to bless and enrich the lives of others, they have no meaning or significance for me. Perhaps this is why one of my favorite poems is the one by Philip M. Raskin, which I quote:

“I will not change my path with you,
O worshippers of gold!
My path is rough, but heaven-lit,
And yours is smooth, but cold.

“In your resplendent halls each night
The ghost of envy strides,
Whilst in the castle of my heart
The living God resides.

“My heart is young, though youth is gone;
Your hearts in youth are old;
I will not change one golden dream
For all your dreams of gold.”

What else do I ask of Life? I think that next in importance to health, to economic security, is the blessing of *friendship*. I ask of Life, then, friends and friendship. I crave friends who are understanding; such friends are amongst Life's richest blessings. Give me true friendship, loyal friends, and I shall be amongst the rich of the earth. I ask for friends who may be so true that I may dare to appear to them as I truly am; friends so true as to be enabled to be truly intimate with them; friends with whom one can talk without reserve, and to whom one

may stand revealed without mask or veil ; friends who are comforting and stimulating ; friends to whom I could be loyal, friends upon whom I could bestow my deep affection and stand as close to them as I stand to my own.

Now, no life, no man has many such friends, and no man needs *many* friends of this kind. But unless one has a *few* such friends there can be no happiness in life. And unless one can himself *be* such a friend, one is not likely to find happiness in life.

I ask of Life, in the fourth place, the gift of *social-mindedness*, by which I mean, a sense of kinship with all men and a sense of responsibility for them, for their happiness, and well-being. I ask for the will and ability to feel the pulse of humanity, the opportunity of knowing the heart-beat of my brother-man, of having a sense of kinship with all God's children. I ask for this not alone because of the comfort of being "not alone", but for that good which can come to my soul with the knowledge that I am one in the ranks of the host of human advance. I ask for this blessing not alone because I can *receive* something through it, but more especially because of the challenge it offers to *share my life* with others ; because it makes it possible to make my life more significant through communion with others ; because it challenges me to serve not self alone, but others ; to be useful ; to seek to make my own life meaningful to others ; to follow the

great and the inspired souls amongst men, and on occasion, perchance, even to be privileged to lead and guide others out of the vales and plains, unto the hills!

And this too, I ask of the forces that mold Life. These forces, remember I said, were Self, Society, God. I ask of them *that my mind may never become static*, that mine would never be the menace of a closed mind. I hope and pray that this mind of mine may remain ever open, may be ever inquisitive, may be always endowed with intellectual curiosity. That like unto the tent of Abraham of old, it may be open on all sides, sensitive to the stirrings in the intellectual life of mankind, ever seeking, ever questing, ever receptive, not alone to that which the past has to offer, not alone to that which the momentary present gives, but that through imaginativeness and through an openness to ideas and influences, my mind may have the elasticity to project itself even into the future!

And coming as I do now, to what I believe to be the climactic values of life, I ask, I hope, I pray that *a sense of the mystery of life* may never desert me, and that the sense of appreciation of the reality of the intangibles of life may never forsake me. Reverently as I know them now, I would know them better. Joyously as I acknowledge them, I seek the greater joy of an ever deeper experience of the spiritual. I ask of Life for the opportunity of a greater knowledge

of God, for the possibility of experiencing Him ever more and more. I do yearn to be able to come closer to Him and prayerfully, reverently, do I seek Him.

And finally, I ask of Life that it be given unto me so earnestly to seek, so humbly to serve, so reverently to live and to do, so heroically to dare to abide by this, my program of life, as to be able to stir others to a like quest and endeavor.

And so I recapitulate. I ask of Life, first, the physical basis of health and vigor; second, economic security in a measure sufficient to provide creature comforts, intellectual and cultural contacts, education for children and training them for useful living; third, friends and friendship; fourth, the gift of social-mindedness; fifth, an abiding intellectual curiosity; sixth, an enlargement of the sense of the spiritual; and seventh, the courage to live on the plane of the highest and greatest usefulness.

I know full well that the attainment of these is as greatly dependent upon my own will and efforts as upon the will and efforts of others. But, however, they may come, whether I attain them all, whether Life grant me all or only a portion of them, I have in these outlined for myself *a program of life* which expresses *for me* not alone my desire to receive, but even more and especially the obligation, the duty, to give to Life what it is in my power to contribute. For as I ask of Life to give unto me, the possibility of my

receiving is conditioned in a very large measure by my desire to give to Life what it rightly asks and imperatively demands of me! As I ask the question, *What Do I Ask of Life?* I ask also the other question which is complementary to it: *What Does Life Ask of Me?* I realize fully that my attainment of that which I *ask* is dependent to a very large degree upon *my granting to Life that which it claims.*

And so, may I not suggest to you to try to work out for yourselves your own program of life. Ask yourselves the question, and fascinating is the exercise of giving the answer, *What Do You Really Ask of Life?* and then ask again, *What Does Life Ask of You?* Answer these questions to yourselves, answer them honestly, and think of your answer as though it were your last will and testament, your last spoken word to the world that you know, the word by which you would be remembered and judged. Then proceed to guide your lives accordingly, whilst I endeavor to guide my life by my answer to these questions, and I think that when we answer honestly and truly, and live on the noble plane we found for ourselves, we shall discover, also, that your life and mine will blend into a harmony and a unity which as far as men can make it, will be sweet and cheering, satisfying and soulful.

AN AMERICAN CREED

BY

RABBI ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN

The Rotary Club of Hartford, Conn., through its Committee on International Service of which the speaker was chairman, sponsored an Essay Contest in the High Schools of Hartford and West Hartford. The general theme was "Americanism", and 175 essays were submitted. The prizes for the best essays were awarded on Monday evening, May 18, 1931, in the Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall, and this address was given on that occasion.

AN AMERICAN CREED



LET my first word on this occasion be a word of thanks to all those who have made this occasion possible, to the *Hartford Times* and its publisher, Mr. Rolfe, for their remarkable coöperation; to the donors of the prizes; to the Board of Education for permission to conduct this contest; to the Principals and Faculties of the high schools; to the management of this Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall for their kindness and coöperation; to the Rotary Club for its understanding spirit; and last, but by no means least, to the three judges whose task was both difficult and delicate.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to initiate and to guide this project. To be sure, the task, at times, appeared arduous. But the coöperation that was forthcoming was challenging and cheering. All this coöperation meant, to me and others, an assurance that we have in these annual contests the germ of a good idea and the elements of a noble cause. The coöperation so generously offered meant further that we had for

this project the approval of an influential and helpful group in our community.

Last year's contest dealt with International Peace, with good-will and understanding between nations, the possibility of these between America and the world. We thought this year, that we might look within, and inasmuch as America represents an ingathering of the civilized world, inasmuch as we have here the sons and daughters of all the peoples and races of the world, and inasmuch as we live here and attempt to create a common life and fulfill a common destiny, that it would be well this year to focus our attention upon the need and value of integrating our American life, that it would be well to direct our attention to that basic American idealism which, regardless of racial, historic, social origins, is the common heritage of all of us in America. We felt that as we are able to direct the attention especially of our younger people to our American idealism, as we are able to help them steep their spirit in the glory of America's beginnings, and expose them to the stimulus of its early idealism, we today, may be able to go forth spiritually refreshed, and may go towards fulfillment and not into the bypaths of negation.

Someone said to me the other day, "Is it not tragic that we have to be called back to the ideals which surged within us in the beginning of our national history? Is it not tragic that we have to reappraise our life today to try to discover

whether we had been true to our heritage?" In a certain sense that is true. It is tragic, for it means that we have strayed and that all too many of us have departed from the spirit of the founding fathers, and that whilst the outer shell and form have been preserved, much of that beautiful and glorious spirit has been perverted or allowed to die of pernicious anemia. But, in another sense, it is possible to think that it is not so tragic. Perhaps it is only a simple manifestation of our human weakness. Habit dulls, and we had become habituated in the slogans which challenged previous generations and without ever pausing, or seldom pausing, to wonder whether those slogans mean anything to us, we have wandered away from them. I feel, therefore, that stock-taking is good, appraisal and reappraisal of our American life is good, consideration and reconsideration of that which we fondly believe is the American heritage is good, for we should be rebaptized from time to time in the spirit of America, that we may ever remain true to that spirit.

In part, this was the intention of this contest, but not this alone. I conceive of America in the form of a candelabrum, a torchiere, if you will. The candelabrum may be ornamental without light, but its usefulness and its greatest value is as a vessel which holds the enkindled flame and sheds light about it. In other words, America, unless it radiates those enkindling, warming, stirring lights of its original idealism, may be a

symbol of a glory that is past, may be an ornament that is attractive, may be good to behold with the physical eye, but would not touch the spirit. To function, to be at its best, it must give light, the light which we fondly believe it has to give. And we want, by means of this contest, to redirect the attention of the younger and the older amongst us to the spiritual values, to the spiritual glories, and to the duties which grow out of the spiritual challenge which America at her best has.

I feel that it is the aim and purpose of this contest to direct attention to the ideals of which I speak, in order that we may be able to realize once again that the ideals which form our American heritage are *universal* ideals and that no single racial or ethnic group has or can have any monopoly of that heritage. The heritage of ideals which America fosters is as broad as the human spirit. It is as deep as the human soul. And all who profess loyalty to these ideals, all who are lured by them, and above all who *live* by them are, as I understand it, in the direct line of the American spiritual promise. They are the direct heirs of the prophetic spirit of the founding fathers, they are—regardless of their background, regardless of their antecedents, regardless of their grandfathers, regardless of their means or station or influence, they and they alone are in this noble, spiritual sense—Americans. All others are pretenders.

We wanted to stress this idea by means of this contest. Also, because we want, as I said, to integrate if possible our American life, because we want to see an American unity, but this a unity based not upon a blood heritage, be it Saxon blood, or Celtic blood, or Gaelic blood, or Slavonic, or Teutonic, or Semitic. The unity of America is dependent upon our recognition of the fact that our common possession is a heritage of ideas and ideals which we have made our own. In other words, what I am stressing is this thought: We are Americans not because of our fathers, not because of what they were. We are, or we are not, Americans, because of what *we* are and because of what *we* choose to be.

We wanted to stress and have stressed the idea and need of Americanization. But "Americanization" must not be an attempt to cast all, or all who would be Americans, into a common, uniform, leveling mold. Americanization is not kindred to Prussianization. Americanization must never be what Russification was. Certainly, Americanization does not mean the same as Sovietization means. We must not assume that the foreign born alone need Americanization. Rather must the assumption be that all of us, native and naturalized alike, (whether of the first generation of Americans, or of the sixth, or twelfth generation is immaterial), observing as we do some tendencies in American life, need ever to be Americanized. We wanted to stress the

thought that Americanization is needed, and needed alike, by native born and foreign born. I say this because it is undeniably true that many, all too many perhaps today, stand in need of a conscious and fervent and if heed be sacrificial rededication of themselves to the ideals of America's beginnings.

I have not the time this evening to go into a comprehensive discussion of all that I understand by American ideals. Let me stress just this, that as I conceive American life, as I understand its history and read its purpose, I think there are three basic ideals. One, of course, is *Liberty*, and I think that this liberty needs as much stress as I sometimes think was laid by the great law giver Moses when he enjoined the Sabbath upon his people. For, said he, the Sabbath is to be a reminder that "thou wert a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord thy God led thee out from thence with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, therefore did the Lord thy God command thee to observe the Sabbath." The meaning there is: Ye were slaves, ye are now liberated; do not now proceed to enslave yourselves to your daily routine, or job, or task. Preserve the spirit of freedom, cast away the spirit of the serf, stand erect as men, free born, free by right Divine.

So too with our American Liberty. Our fathers have thrown off the yoke of imperial power and control. Let us not now create a new tyr-

anny or tolerate such a tyranny to be created from amongst our own ranks. It makes no difference how high born or low born be the tyrant, be he one who wields a scepter and wears a crown, or one who sits in the smoke-filled room of a hotel and determines the destiny of a people, or lies in bed at the end of a telephone wire communicating his will which when followed casts a blotch almost ineradicable upon the banner of American life.

I think of *Unity* as a basic American ideal. Unity, not uniformity! I think that we are one people and that, as another has shrewdly pointed out, the hyphen which some pseudo-Americans say divides Americans is in a very real sense the *link* that forges the foreign born in loyalty, in love, in devotion to American life and American institutions! And there are people in this country today who need to be reminded that our ideal is to realize in America a colorful and radiant unity and not a congealing uniformity.

I conceive of *democracy* as the third basic American ideal, democracy with a small "d", a democracy which is possible only where liberty and unity truly exist.

I would have these ideals emphasized and re-emphasized because I feel that it is important for most of us to realize that there is a difference between living in America and living *for* America. To live in America alone (whether one was born here or not is immaterial), is a privilege and not

a duty. But to live *for* America is a duty which calls upon us to contribute to it of the best of which each is capable, of the best with which each is endowed. I am a Jew. You may be Irish, French, Swedish, German, Anglo-Saxon, Scotch, by descent. What you are and what you contribute is dependent upon that rich heritage which is yours, which has come to you from the centuries of life and experience which preceded you. You remember Oliver Wendell Holmes saying once, "We are omnibuses driven by our ancestors", and I, a Jew, can contribute of that which forty centuries of the history of my people back of me have created and developed. That is my contribution. You contribute that with which your heritage has blessed you. But we must contribute, you—yours, and I—mine, and lay that lovingly upon the altar of America.

But in order to contribute, and to continue to give, you and I must deepen that heritage which is ours. Take my Jewishness from me and what am I and who am I? Take your heritage from you and you are colorless and poverty-stricken. In order to continue to contribute to American life, I must have something to give and that something I can contribute only as I remain sturdily, vigorously and affirmatively myself for the sake of America. This is very much like any one member of an orchestra must continue to rehearse, to practice, to perfect himself in the art of playing his particular instrument for the sake of

the team work and the performance of the whole orchestra. So must each of us deepen and perfect our heritage. *This, too, is a form of Americanism!*

Now all of these aspects we had in mind when the contest was announced, because we realized, that, as American life is unified, as unity is established, *not uniformity*, we may be able to widen the mental horizon of some of our American people, and make it possible for them to see the world of man, and not exclusively their own town or village; that they will see the world of men in the light of a unity of God's children and through their good will for all who live and serve, through fellowship, through understanding, through co-operation with our fellows about us, and with God's children, our brothers, everywhere, we may be privileged to help in the making out of this world a better, a kindlier, a more fit abode for man created in the spiritual image of God.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that this is the *old* Americanism! I submit to you that this is the Americanism of those sturdy generations which centuries ago have come to these shores and have here builded not only a continent, but a new kind of civilization. And I say that what we need today is emphasis not upon a new freedom, but upon the old freedom, the older concepts of America, the idealism which surged in the hearts and lives and souls of the Washingtons, and the Jeffersons, the Franklins, the Adamses,

the Lowells, and in our own generation, of a Holmes, a Wilson and a Roosevelt. They of the past have created. We, today, are their beneficiaries. But such is the greatness of America, such is its potentiality, that they of the older generation and the noble sons who carry on today, and the later comers, the immigrants and the sons of immigrants of later generations, become blended into the picture of American life and creativity and, the appellations "old" and "new" vanish as one beholds the composite picture of a spiritually vigorous American life.

May I close with a parable? It is a true parable. Twenty-five years ago on last Friday, a lad arrived in this country, an immigrant boy, who knew not the language and knew not the customs and the manners of this country. He was lured here as his father was before him, by something which the Old World did not have. As he came into the harbor of New York of a night and beheld the statue of Liberty with the torch of liberty illumining the skies, something within him responded to that and in his simple boylike way, he vowed then that he would be worthy of that symbol.

Years passed. The lad studied, and he worked. He entered a profession. He became a teacher of men, and in the course of his service, he came to Hartford. One day, as Hartford was celebrating the sesquicentennial of American independence, that immigrant boy found himself

standing in the Old State House of Connecticut where, by invitation, he was expounding under the auspices of the Daughters of the American Revolution his understanding of American ideals and American concepts, an exposition which was graciously and approvingly received. And then as he stepped off that platform and stood in the corridor surveying the scene, he stood surrounded not only by the whirling mass of people at that particular exhibit, but he was surrounded also by his wife and his children born on this soil. It occurred to him, as he stood there that day, that that very day marked the 20th anniversary of his arrival as an immigrant, as a foreigner upon these shores. He was stirred, and he voiced his thanks to God there in the Old State House of Connecticut, he breathed his prayer of gratitude for the American ideal, for American opportunity, for American democracy!

Since that day five years have passed, and now at the completion of twenty-five years since his coming to these shores as a foreigner and an alien, that same lad stands tonight upon the platform of the Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall interpreting the spirit of America. Again, this time he is thanking God for the glory of American ideals, and he prays earnestly that those ideals may never be dimmed or betrayed. He thinks he understands those ideals and as he seeks to interpret them, he pleads for their preservation and for their enhancement. He knows that

today the America of the past and the America of the future, the America of the Pilgrim immigrants and the America of the Russian immigrant must be one, a unity, yea, a continuity. The past and the present must be one if the future be assured and if our ideal be fulfilled. And may not that lad standing tonight in this beautiful memorial to a great American be forgiven for thinking that he speaks with the voice of the best of the American ideal tradition, and will he be understood aright when he vows tonight as he did on that night twenty-five years ago, looking at the statue of Liberty in the harbor of New York, that to his last breath he chooses to *live* for America and that with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might he will help to protect those ideals against perversion, against sham, against desecration! And will not you, men and women, will you not join him in this vow, will you not dedicate yourselves with him to that same loyalty, will you not pledge your heart and your honor to this same great cause? May God grant it!

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